

Then Came Hazrat Ali

Autobiography 1972

D. F. Karaka

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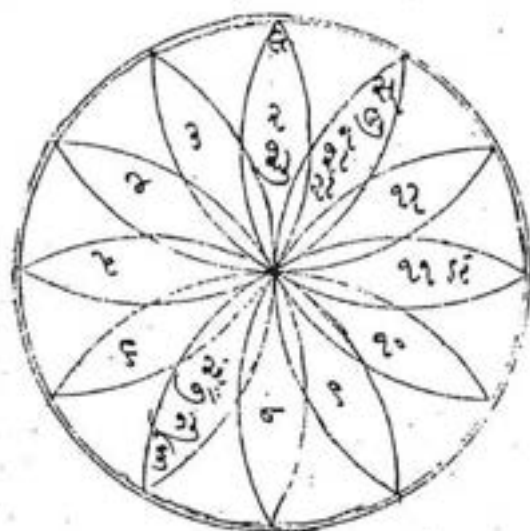
My horoscope is cast

THE UPPER caste Hindus of India believe in astrology. A man able to plot the accurate position of the planets at the time of a child's birth is entitled to call himself a *pandit*. Knowledge of astrology is as a rule passed down from father to son. From a horoscope, correctly cast, it is possible to make an accurate prediction.

The luxury of knowing the future, originally confined to the Hindus, spread in time to other communities in India. The Parsis, who over 1300 years ago were only refugees from ancient Persia, adopted many Hindu customs in order to be assimilated into the mainstream of Indian civilization. They had landed in their primitive sailing vessels at the coastal town of Surat, north-west of Bombay, bringing with them their urns of sacred fire which they feared would be extinguished by their Arab conquerors, whose faith was Islam.

So that when a child was born in a reasonably well-placed Parsi family such as ours, which could afford a *pandit's* fee, it was customary to equip the young fellow with a *janma-patrika*. 'Janma,' is Sanskrit for birth, 'patrika' means papers. The Anglo-Saxon birth certificate which the British issued to the Indians during the days of their empire was a tame, colourless document compared with the exotic complex of zodiac signs which figured in the Indian's horoscope. For the poorer Indian a horoscope was not necessary for there was very little likelihood of his having a future.

Here is a page of my horoscope indicating the position of the stars at the time of my birth:



On the inside cover page of this handwritten pamphlet, which goes into several pages, my father had written in English in his chiselled handwriting a few additional notes for the benefit of the lay members of the family.

Name: Dosabhoy Framji Karaka—

Date of Birth: 14th April, 1911 (Good Friday)

Time of Birth: 8.47 a.m. (Standard Time)

Parsi Roj — Sarehwar — month Avan — Shenshahi year 1280.

While the Hindus had high and low caste, we Parsis could only have class—high or low, as the case may be, depending on the family's social status in the community. Status in turn revolved around wealth and education, mainly wealth, because it was an easier way to acquire recognition. Education helped, but the foundation of class among the Parsis of the early 1900's was laid on the more solid base of an inheritance. Judged by prevailing standards, our family was middle class, happily in the upper bracket.

Narration of the details of my birth in my book, *"I've Shed My Tears"*¹ was however based on the Christian pattern. It read: "In the churches prayers were said the

¹ New York, 1947.

morning I was born. Not for me. It was Good Friday, April 14th, 1911. A quiet, peaceful India heard an infant cry."

This book was intended to be a proud interpretation of my country which was then nearing the end of its struggle for liberation from a hundred and twenty-five years of British rule, which had begun to get irksome. At the time of writing that book, I was not aware how close we were to freedom, much less to the problems that followed in the wake of our liberation.

Merely to repeat what one wrote a quarter of a century ago does little credit to a writer. He must move—and move on.

Yet an individual's life does consist mainly of moments important to him, and to him alone. They may be moments of love, passion, ecstasy, moments of personal triumph when the ego within swells, bursting to express itself. They could be moments of defeat also. The character of a man can often be judged by his reaction to such moments and by the control exercised of the gnawing hurt within, control too of the tear that is ready to drop. A man's life is a conglomeration of such moments.

Back to my horoscope, a salient feature of which, as even a novice in astrology knows, is that Mars was in the Tenth House at the time of my birth. It denotes, as all the *pandits* have told me, the characteristics of a fighter. They were, however, not able to say when one fight would end and another begin.

From personal experience, however, Mars in this particular natal setting has side effects about which none of the *pandits* whose palms had been crossed with so much silver, had ever warned me. At times I have had a certain feeling that I can clearly see the future, yet no one has been willing to go with me, dismissing my clear vision as only an empty mirage. Patton who led the U.S. Third Army must have been born with Mars in the Tenth House if his frustrations were correctly recorded by his biographers.

I remember standing in a queue with an Indian student

outside the Albert Hall in London in the early 1930's to buy tickets for a boxing match. Tommy Farr, who then had top billing in English boxing, was the star attraction that afternoon. By the time we got down from the bus the queue for the cheaper seats which was all we could afford, was already very long. Boxing fans were wound around the hall and slowly we crept up in the line until we came within four places of the box-office window. Just then a newspaper lad came waving an afternoon paper, yelling, "Big fight result. Read all about the big fight". It was first the wait in the queue that was frustrating and then, when our turn came, the fight was over.

Other planets and their positions are no less important. Jupiter has saved me many a time. Venus has been a beneficial planet, regulating my emotional complex, that knotted bundle of nerves somewhere in the pit of the stomach which when they get disturbed, produce what the doctors call a vasomotocentre disturbance.

Mars has never allowed me to give up; it would be easier if it had. Instead, the reflexes which in other men would break out into uncontrolled emotion, depression, even suicide were held together in me because of a control characteristic of those born with Mars in this house. No other planet produces so much trouble.

By the time *Tears* came out, we were nearing Independence Day, August 15, 1947. The tempo of life in India quickly changed. The British as well as the Indians who purchased books in the English language for the sheer joy of reading, turned their minds to the new problems facing them — the British to quitting India, the Indians to the opportunities that lay ahead. Book sales dropped; newspapers were all one had time to read.

Mars had played havoc with quite a few of my books, although I had no trouble with my first two, published by J. M. Dent and Frederick Muller respectively, both slight inconsequential volumes intended to be my break into the London publishing world rather than a contribution to contemporary literature. The first, *The Pulse of Oxford*, was

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an interpretation of my university, the second a mild satire, *Oh! You English*. Bumpus, the well-known bookseller on London's Oxford Street, gave my second book a corner of his precious window for a whole week — a stack of my books decoratively window-dressed and beside it a picture of me with a felt hat, rakishly worn, Humphrey Bogart style.

Although afraid I might be recognised, I decided to go down to Oxford Street after the shops were closed. I wanted to see how Londoners reacted to this gorgeous display.

I went only once. That was enough. It was in the evening, on my way to dinner. I approached the bookshop with my overcoat collar turned up, my hat brim turned down. All this was quite unnecessary for no one so much as paused for a moment at this bookshop at that time of the night. I hung around. Soon two working girls came along, walking arm-in-arm. They stood near me and looked at the window display. Then one of them said, "Aw yew English, what does that mean?" The other girl replied, "I dunno. But I wuddunt mind him on my day off". They giggled and walked away.

I took the bus back to my digs in Gloucester Place, not feeling hungry any more. Something must be wrong with my book or my picture, I realised, if this was the reaction a window display at Bumpus produced. Perhaps my style of writing or medium of expression was wrong. Moreover, sex was slowly creeping into English life and that was perhaps what was missing in my writing. On the other hand, if one produced in print the nakedness of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the chances at that time were that such a book would be sold only under the counter in a left bank, Paris bookshop or along with "feelthee poste-cards" at Port Said, outside the famous shop, Simon Artz. I do not want sordid fame, I kept saying to myself, ignoring the fact that no fame of any kind at all was coming my way. A new trend was clearly discernible. Sophisticated satire was easing out; mild sex was creeping into English books, in fiction mainly. Frustrated men were trying to express themselves; frustrated women were buying these books to

read in bed, beside husbands who preferred to turn over the pages of *Sporting Life*. I decided to try my hand at fiction, for that was where the money and the success lay. Laboriously I produced a polished manuscript, most of which was long handed and later self-typed, on which Muller had first option. I tentatively called it *We Ungrateful Sons*.

Pleased with my work of many months I rang Frederick Muller to tell him I had finished my first novel. He was a charming old man, one of the kindest publishers a young man could have. "When can I see it?", he asked as if it was to be the showpiece of his new book list. Later that afternoon I hopped on a bus to Holborn to deliver the *opus* personally to him. The occasion called for a glass of sherry, which he poured out from a decanter in his office room and as he looked at the title page, I had to restrain myself from asking how big the first edition was likely to be. I felt the novel was good, just what young England wanted.

Nothing happened for three whole weeks and I began to get fidgety. ~~Muller had not telephoned me.~~ To take the initiative and contact him would indicate an undue anxiety which was damaging to the prestige of an author. I let another week pass. Eventually I received the manuscript back through the post from Muller with a brief letter informing me that the first half of the novel was well paced, the characters emerging softly from the early pages, but the second half of the novel was far too jerky, a treatment which though modern would produce neither good reviews nor good sales. The suggestion Muller made was that if I re-wrote the second half of the novel, he would be glad to have another look at it. Rewrite half a book! Nothing more shattering could happen to a young man's pride than to be asked to rewrite half his creative work. It was too depressing to consider such a prospect.

About the same time, Keith Briant, a close friend of mine at Oxford, who had just published his first book, invited me to a sherry party. His publisher was an enterprising man, who had earlier worked with Victor Gollancz and had now branched out on his own. This was Michael Joseph.

Disappointed though I was with my rejection slip from Frederick Muller, I went to Keith's party because I believe one should never deny a friend the right to celebrate his moment of success.

The walnut brown sherry, which came from an old wine shop in Oxford, helped to soften the blow for me and before long the guest of the evening, Michael Joseph himself turned up, a calm, businesslike person who later became one of the most successful publishers London has known. He seemed interested in seeing my rejected manuscript.

A fortnight later there was an amazing reaction. Michael Joseph had looked at my novel. According to him the first half of it was too slow paced, almost lethargically Edwardian. It was the second half of the novel he liked, the part Muller had suggested I should re-write. Mr. Joseph, however, said he was not going to suggest I re-write any of it. Instead, he would be interested in a straight book on India from me. If I could do an outline for him and an opening chapter he was prepared to commission it. That was a refreshing reaction, precise and clear. It brought back life to much that was dead in me.

I took time to think out the book Mr. Joseph wanted me to write. I gave it a working title and soon began Chapter I. With a publisher's offer in hand, I knew I could do it. I titled my manuscript for Michael Joseph, *I Was Born Dark*, a lovely warm title, I thought. The book however appeared as *I Go West* because the publishers felt that my choice of title was misleading. It denoted African authorship, they said.

On the day before *I Go West* was published in 1938, Anthony Eden resigned as Britain's Foreign Secretary. He differed from his government on the Ethiopian question. Out of six London newspapers which were to splash the news of the publication of my book, only one headline materialised. It was in the *Daily Sketch*. It read: "OXFORD INDIAN SAYS ENGLISH GIRLS SEX STARVED". God forbid! Could I ever have made such a remark? I would not even now want to check if in its 250-odd double-demy

pages I may have implied it.

Mars in the Tenth House has refused to budge from my natal chart since then. Like an obstreperous tenant he declines to accept all offers of alternative accommodation in an equally good or even better locality. Occasionally to complicate matters, Saturn who thrives on producing defeat sometimes pays a call on him in the same or a nearby house. What a time they have when they get together! The Marquis de Sade used to whip his women before squirting passion into them but when Mars and Saturn foregather in my horoscope, the cruelty the Borgias perpetrated would seem easy to relieve with an aspirin. Only powerful Jupiter whose habit is to arrive on the scene in the nick of time has saved me from many a count of ten. Jupiter, the *pandits* say, preserves a man's *izzat*, the Urdu word for self-respect. But by then the Mars-Saturn combination has done enough damage to pulverise a man and make him realise how utterly insignificant he is. If he resists, he is smacked down; if he yields after swallowing gulps of pride, maybe the punishment becomes a little lighter to bear.

Astrology when accurately plotted can be a science of precise prediction. Interpretations of a horoscope often vary, depending on how an individual *pandit* reads a certain planetary conjunction just as two bridge or chess players react differently at a given moment of the same game. Again, the individual himself, though born in a certain setting, is given enormous scope for the exercise of his free will. All that astrology can do is to chart a trend for him at a given period of his life. A favourable trend is called a *yog*, which should not be confused with yoga. The latter relates to the flexing of muscles, the acquired ability to hold one's breath and meditate on a lofty plane. The science of *yoga* can make a yogi perform abnormal physical feats such as walking over burning charcoal without scorching his feet or being buried alive under sand, arising a few hours later, still alive. But a *yog* is a favourable aspect to do a certain thing at a certain time. A man's chances of a successful marriage or

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a love affair would be rated high when his Venus is in the ascendant. Arranged marriages in India have been justified on the basis that the *pandit* has looked into the planetary setting of a boy and a girl whose parents are arranging such a marriage. There is no need, if Indian astrology is followed, for a try out at a week-end as the Swedes do. Among very orthodox Indians, even a look at the bride or the bridegroom is not permitted. A successful Hindu marriage should produce at least one male heir, regarded as a divine blessing. Thus astrology in India is like an X-ray to a surgeon. It is essential on the eve of an operation. It gives the surgeon an idea of what to expect when he opens up his patient.

But, there are cases such as mine where the accuracy available early on, suddenly disappears and no one can read the horoscope any more. This I realised some years ago when a well-known Bombay jeweller, a good friend of mine, showed my horoscope to his personal *swami* who lived on the premises in order to perform *puja* for him at various hours of the day.. The holy man in saffron clothes was also good at reading horoscopes, my friend told me. As I was in a difficult patch of luck at that time when nothing seemed to go right, my friend asked his *pandit* to look at my horoscope and see when the difficult patch would transit into more comfortable living.

A few days later when I went to ascertain the soothsayer's verdict, the *pandit* calmly told my friend: "There is nothing to read in his horoscope any more. The stars clearly say he should already have died some time ago. But I see he is still alive". The *swami* added: "With such a horoscope I am surprised he has not committed suicide". My friend was embarrassed.

Yet I knew my horoscope was correctly cast. It had predicted almost to the day such little details as a car accident which occurred a few months after my mother gave me £100 to buy my first car, a slinky M. G. When my father tried to stop the gift because of this prediction, the *pandit* said: "Whether you give him a car or not, he will have an accident. It will not be fatal or serious; only

a small scar on his face will always remain". And so it happened in the Christmas week of 1933 when before Henley I skidded on a patch of ice and my sports car turned turtle. A "scar on upper lip" has been the mark of identification on my passport ever since.

My horoscope is now just a piece of paper, for what no one could read therein was the faith that has come to me in later years. That faith has changed my destiny. Otherwise, as the *pandit* rightly said, it could easily have been suicide.

2

The formative years

SURNAMES AMONG the Parsis as also among the Hindus were mainly indicative of a family's vocation. Originally a child was given just his own personal or Christian name. A boy when born, would on the English pattern be called John or James or whatever his parents wished to call him. With the Parsis, the names were originally Persian — Cyrus, Rustom, Sorab, Fram, Peshotam. Later there were adaptations of Hindu and Muslim, even Mogul names. My grandfather's name was Jehangir, the same as that of the Mogul Emperor who was the son of Akbar and father of Shah Jehan. In time, Persian names began to have the Hindu suffix of *ji* intended to be a more respectful way of addressing an individual. Thus my father's name which should have been only Fram, became Framji. Refugees when they stray from their roots tend to absorb all manner of surrounding influences.

A man's first name was sufficient as far as the family was concerned but for more formal identification, it was essential to relate him to his father. This was based on the requirements of the courts in India which in turn followed the old English pattern. It was the routine of the courts to ask a man his name and then ask him, "Son of?". Thus John was not enough; on the recorded evidence there had to appear the full name, "John son of Robert". My father would thus have been Fram or Framji, son of Jehangir. Later, the 'son of' was dropped and Framji Jehangir was

the form retained. Thus the second name of every Parsi is the name of his father. If there were three sons of Jehangir, they would have been called Framji Jehangir, Rustom Jehangir and Sorab Jehangir.

That was the early form. As Indians became more sophisticated, a third name was added. This was the surname. It was indicative of the vocation of the head of the family when surnames came into vogue. Thus Fram son of Jehangir was not enough, it was necessary to identify which Fram, son of which Jehangir. Thus came such Parsi surnames as Doctor, which indicated a medical practitioner, Vakil which meant lawyer, Patel who was the village headman, Batliwala a dealer in empty bottles, Merchant which was self-explanatory and so on. There was even a Parsi family by the name of Thukchat. "*Thuk*" pronounced 'thook' means spit; "*chat*" means to lick. Thus Thukchat would literally mean spit-licker. How such a surname came into being is not recorded.

The surname Karaka does not have any vocational meaning but I remember my father saying that one of our ancestors worked for a Dutchman in his factory in Surat and probably our surname had a link up with the Dutchman's factory.

My father's name, Framji, was the same as that of his great-grandfather. Framji the first was a humble little man, who in his old age came into contact with the first Governor of Bombay, Sir Bartle Frere. Desirous of doing something for the old man for whom he had developed a fond regard, Sir Bartle asked if he had any sons who could be put into the service of the British, then the paramount power. Framji the first, aware that such a chance only came once in the lifetime of a poor Parsi family, produced before Sir Bartle his eldest son. The Englishman had a few words with the young lad then disappointedly turned to old Framji and asked, "Haven't you got another brighter lad for whom I can do something?" The eldest boy did not spark genius. The second son, Dosabhai, was then produced for inspection by Sir Bartle. *Dosa* means old, *bhai* means brother.

Dosabhai came to pass the test and the Karakas turned a new leaf in their family album. Dosabhai was the first 'native' to become Sheriff of Bombay. He received Edward VII as Prince of Wales on the shores of India. There was until recent years a lovely bronze equestrian statue commemorating that welcoming scene with Edward on a magnificent charger and on the four plaques around the pedestal were the figures of the prominent citizens of Bombay wearing their traditional hoof caps and long Parsi tunics tied at the front with bows while Dosabhai was seen reading the welcome address to the Prince of Wales on behalf of the citizens of Bombay. Chiselled on those bronze plaques were also several members of our family. After Independence in 1947 because of persistent political agitation, this piece of exquisite bronze was removed from its original site in the centre of the town and placed in the Victoria Gardens which houses the Bombay zoo. There it now stands.

Dosabhai wrote the *History of the Parsis* published in 1884 by Macmillan in London. In two gilt-leafed volumes, it is a work important enough to be mentioned by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as the main reference book on the Parsis. Dosabhai signed his name just Dosabhai Framji, which was the old way of saying Dosabhai son of Framji. For the authorship of the book however, he used our family name of Karaka.

His son who also served the British in high office was Jehangir, my grandfather. Preferring to be known by his well-known father's name, he styled himself Jehangir Dosabhai Framji. When it came to my father's turn, it was time to revert to the family name of Karaka. Thus if I were genealogically to string out my full name, it would be: Dosabhoy Framji Jehangir Dosabhai Framji Karaka. The difference in the way of spelling my first name and Dosabhai's is to be attributed to an attempt to Anglicise *bhai* to the more fashionable *bhoy*. So it would seem in retrospect. It is of no real importance because all Indian names and words can be spelt in English the way you like. It is only the sound that matters.

My attention was drawn to this difference in spelling by the Librarian of the U.S. Library of Congress to whom my publishers had sent my first book in order to register my copyright. One day a postcard arrived signed by a lady librarian. She sweetly asked whether my *Pulse of Oxford* should be catalogued with my earlier *History of the Parsis*! I replied: "Madam, You will agree I could not be a very bright boy at Oxford University if I am still up here fifty years after my first book. That book was written by my great-grandfather". There was no reply.

From early on, I was always itching to put pen to paper. At the age of six, I seem to have owned a small diary which recently came to light among old family papers. In it there is only one entry. In unformed, childish handwriting it read, "Saw mamma in car". We were on a holiday at a small seaside resort called Deolali. With this, my early literary effort was exhausted for there was no other observation in the whole year.

I next remember my grandfather taking me to a small stationer's shop to have a monogrammed rubber stamp made, a very flowery intermingling of my initials, D.F.K. I had no one to write to in those days. The boys and girls of my age I regarded as too childish and I was not ripe or ready to write to a grown-up myself. But I wasted a great deal of family notepaper at the age of eight writing long epistles to my grandfather in whose house we lived. I would give these letters to the servants in the house to hand-deliver to him from our part of the bungalow to his. Thus from an early age I was always wanting to express myself, a young man in search of an audience. My grandfather would send for me and tell me he had received my letter but he would also point out where my spelling had gone wrong. This used to embarrass me for I did not like being shown up as a child. At times I felt disappointed that he missed the point of my epistles in which the styling and the form was so much more important to me than the spelling. No one else of my age wrote such letters or any letters at all. That was what mattered to me.

I grew up as a precocious child, one who lived very much in a world of his own. I day-dreamed a lot for I could not share my flamboyant thoughts with those of my own age nor with my elders lest they should laugh at me. I went through the schoolboy routine of fancying myself as a Hollywood star in close contact with the great pin-ups of that time — Pola Negri was one, Gloria Swanson another and later Ginger Rogers. I would write long letters to them and they in turn used to mail me their autographed pictures. I believed they did all this by themselves. Later, when I learned how a star handled her fan mail which came to her in the thousands, I got annoyed, not with them, but with myself. I stopped writing. The herd instinct was repugnant to me. Everything had to be on an exclusive personal basis or not at all. The fan mail revelation was just as disillusioning to me as finding out that Father Christmas was only my uncle dressed in a red cloak and that there could be no chimney in a bungalow in tropical Bombay. Everyone likes growing up until one gets the feeling which comes later, of having grown up too fast and grown too old.

There were two main traits in my family. My father, a man of great integrity, was extremely proper and correct. He was cautious, he planned ahead, he aimed always at security. His biggest investment or gamble was the education he gave me at great sacrifice to himself.

Jehangir, my grandfather, had a streak of the Elizabethan in him. His favourite trophy was a billiard cup. He drank whisky and soda moderately but always from an oversized tumbler. His brand of whisky was Antiquary. He served choice clarets at his dinner table and generally enjoyed himself. A picture of him which I still have, shows him dressed in a black morning coat and striped trousers, carrying a shiny black top hat. This outfit was not hired as we have to do nowadays for Royal Ascot or the Members' Enclosure at Epsom on Derby day; his attire was all his own, tailored at a time when a gentleman could buy his clothes at a reasonable price in Saville Row.

My mother was a woman of exquisite taste. Her *saris*,

her few items of jewellery, her bottle of Guerlain's *Mitsouko* perfume, her tiny embroidered handkerchieves were typical of her. Yet she would regularly go to hospitals to visit the poor and to leper homes. She was never afraid. She had some kind of faith in later years which it took me a lot of time to discover. Towards the end of her life, she would after sunset say her evening prayers from the prayer book of the Parsis, the *Zend Avesta*. The *Behram yasht* is a powerful prayer, an invocation to the main disciple of Zoroaster akin to St. Peter in Christianity. There are several *yashts* but they can be recited only at certain times of the day. She would recite the appropriate one sitting on her sofa, her prayer book in hand. A small lace handkerchief covered her grey hair because both for men and women the head must be covered at prayer time.

The formative years of man's life are those which condition his thinking in later life, indicate the vocation he is likely to choose and determine the way of life he should pursue. Psychologists say a criminal's mind starts taking shape in his early youth. This theory, however, does not seem to apply with any uniformity. There are as many criminals born in the lap of luxury as in utter poverty. Petty thieving may be traced to the surroundings of early youth but the brains behind big crime are often known to have been nurtured in cribs lined with satin and silk. Thus, the formative years of a man's life need not necessarily have any bearing on his future conduct. A great deal of an individual's success or failure is conditioned by a combination of destiny, free will and circumstance.

After school and two years at college in Bombay, both Jesuit, I moved to Karachi in Sind because my father had been transferred to that port. This was the Karachi of undivided India. With partition, it went to Pakistan.

We lived in Karachi in spacious quarters above the

Customs House and I had a little room all to myself, overlooking the Keamari wharfs. From my bedroom window I could see barren desert on one side, on the other the tin sheds under which were stacked gunny bags and crates of merchandise. Unromantic to start with, yet when in later years I read Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* the attraction of the desert began to have new meaning for me.

In Karachi, I joined the Dayaram Jethmal Sind College in time for the full two years' course for my Bachelor of Arts degree. I chose literature as my special subject, not because of any aptitude I had earlier displayed but because my father decided it was the best subject to read for an honours course. In his time, he had read literature himself and was partial to it. By coincidence, the period of English literature selected for my two years was the Elizabethan, the same as his.

I made a somewhat jerky beginning, for when I read Elizabethan plays they seemed to lack reality. My first objection was registered in my comment, "But no one talks like this any more". In particular I offered the greatest resistance to the Elizabethan 'aside'. The costumes of that period seemed balloonish and buffoonish, though as I now realise, far less so than the sartorial display of later day London's Carnaby Street. Word power, I felt, was weak in the Elizabethans. Whoever called a woman 'a wench'? It tended to drain them of sex. It made them appear to be Dutch or Swiss milkmaids, good for milking cows, good to be regarded as playthings. A man could have verbal fun with a wench; he could not marry her, much less have an affair.

In the flat next door to ours, was a man from Kerala. His name was Jacob, his initials K. G. The 'G' stood for George, but the 'K' was an unpronounceable South Indian name, Kuruvila. Among the South Indians, the first initial is of the family name, the second of the father's name, the third the personal name. This was confusing.

Jacob was my father's junior colleague. He had obtained a first class in literature at Madras University with specialisa-

tion in the Elizabethan period. Father suggested that I should go over to him in the evenings before or after dinner and see if I could be guided on how to read literature, how to acquire a liking for it and perhaps also how to absorb it.

Jacob, then a bachelor, did not mind doing this. A man who has read literature loves to go back to it even if it involves taking a novice through his early paces. The result of this informal, impromptu tuition was that I learned how to read literature which is the first step towards understanding it. Instead of the dozen or more plays and sonnets of the period which were prescribed in the curriculum, by the time I finished my two-year course I had waded through two hundred plays, known and unknown, written by every conceivable playwright of the period and even of later periods by way of comparison. I had also read almost every sonnet written in the English language. At the end of this marathon reading into which Jacob drilled me, I began to live the period. I understood the Elizabethans; I adored them. All language, I realised, was a means of expressing thought and the English language began to have a fascination for me. Compared to others, it was most powerful and even more so when used with restraint. In the first stages I only had an awareness of its power; it took time, practice and experience to learn how to use that power oneself.

The sonnets were like flowers put in the vase of an office table. They look on as you work; they tire as you tire. Occasionally, though not all the time, you look at them too. The sonnet to which I took an early fancy was Blanco White's, beginning with the line, "Since there's no help, come let's kiss and part". It is difficult now to remember whether my special feeling for this sonnet was because it was so technically perfect or because of the idea embodied in it. All young men get sentimental about kissing and parting. Then they look all over again for someone else to kiss, like a butterfly flitting from flower to flower yet feeling a wrench at each flower it leaves.

Late at night, with the full moon glistening over the tin sheds of the Keamari wharfs I read English literature.

a broad sweep from Chaucer to the later romanticists. Everything was crammed into my two years of solid reading in Karachi.

I was an outsider to Karachi's Sindhi life. I kept myself aloof from it. This lonesomeness made me take refuge in literature. The fops of the Elizabethan stage I got to know better than I did the Sindhi boy or the Sindhi girl. Once again my day dreaming started and I had many a lovely meeting with Shakespeare's Juliet whom I dated, and Desdemona whom I was anxious to save from being throttled at Othello's hands. Dating Portia I avoided. The quality of mercy dropping like a gentle rain from heaven was all right in its proper place but not when it made a romance wet and soggy.

It was after soaking myself in the Elizabethan period that I moved on to the Renaissance. I then felt the need to re-read a book, prescribed for my first year in college, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*. My earlier reading of this book was immature, even though I could recite passages parrot-like. I understood the Gothic was rugged and the Renaissance ornate. Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* illustrated the latter. Michaelangelo raised it to a new height with his Basilica of San Pietro in Vatican city, undisputably beautiful but still incomparable with the Gothic. The Renaissance led to the decadence in the tribe of man.

Slowly the accentuated difference began to seep into my mind. Soon I began to feel this difference between the fundamental truth of the immortal Gothic and the eye appeal of the Renaissance. The soul of man is his identity. The Gothic, large, massive and without relief or ornamentation, stood permanently still. Only when man developed sensitivity could he absorb the meaning of the Gothic.

The planet Jupiter, when powerful in a man's horoscope, brings wisdom to him, the *pandits* say. Wisdom as used in the early days of Indian civilisation was a composite word. It had an ampler meaning than text-book knowledge. As the species of man developed, his understanding became

more refined. Before I left Karachi in 1930, I was ready to feel, to absorb and to understand.

My father's decision to send me to Oxford was arrived at in a most unusual way. When the B.A. results were out, I got an honours degree, but a second class. Only one Sindhi boy from our college got a First. Some six weeks later, the Bombay University, to which Karachi as an educational centre was affiliated, published its annual Examiners' Report on the performance of the students in the various honours courses — history, literature, economics and so on. There was a separate report for each subject. Only numbers were mentioned in the report, no names. Only one number of the 1100 series allotted to Karachi figured in the literature list of "outstanding" papers. The list was a short one with some five or six numbers from the whole University. Everyone presumed that the boy from our college who had scored a First, was the one who had got honourable mention in this select list. By then, those of us who had appeared for the exam, had forgotten our numbers. But the college still had the records and when, some two days later, the number was checked, the Principal's office clerk discovered that this number was mine! It was the Sindhi boy who brought me this news. My professors confirmed it, adding their congratulations but at the same time, they registered surprise. But I could understand what had happened. The Elizabethan period, which constituted the honours course, I had extensively read. Jacob had guided me through it. The 'compulsory' books which consisted of Wordsworth and his Babbling Brook, I had read the minimum required. Consequently, while my marks in the honours papers must have been very high, the overall average was a second class.

Aware that this belated report had no bearing on the results already declared, I mentioned to my parents casually at dinner that night the confusion over numbers that had occurred in our college. I thought it extremely funny that for two days no one thought it necessary to check this number.

My father's reaction was quite extraordinary. He became

serious, put down his knife and fork and stopped eating. The atmosphere at the table suddenly became tense.

"What's the matter, father?" I asked, "Don't you think it funny?"

"I don't think it funny at all", he replied.

My mother intervened to say it was good that I was mentioned, to which my father retorted. "If he is mentioned for an outstanding performance in his stiffer honours papers, why could he not have done as well in his compulsory papers? I know him. He reads only what he likes. That's what I am annoyed about".

I was a bit disappointed at the turn the conversation had taken. Looking straight at me, my father added: "You have the ability. Your examiners have found that ability in you. Yet you won't use it".

I replied that I had done the best I could. Was it my fault that some of my papers were better than others? "Would you have preferred all my papers to have been consistently second class?", I asked him. Fed up at being pitched into when I had brought news which was good, I said, "Everyone in college congratulated me for getting this special mention; only my family hasn't a good word to say". With this, I left the table.

I did not turn to literature that night. I felt like offering "civil disobedience", which was slowly coming into fashion in India. No one seemed to understand that even from an early age I did not necessarily want what others thought was good for me. What I wanted to have, I have striven hard to get, at times very hard. My disappointments have not always shown on my face. A sun Aries with Mars in the Tenth House needs to have an infinite capacity for enduring disappointments. He has often to stand and watch lesser men pass him by. He can see the shore close ahead, but there is no guarantee he will ever make it.

As it was already decided that I should now read law, I spent the next few days reading romantic novels again. I brought Thackeray's *Pendennis* home from the college library. I was reading it late into the night with the

glow from a full moon lighting the sheds on the wharfs below. All nights are clear in India, except during the monsoon and in Karachi there was never much rain. It was a stretch of desert, eternal desert, Arabic in appearance, producing a fascinating aloofness within you, enabling an individual to retain his identity, away from the surrounding scene. It was just the desert and you, an attachment that outstrips time. The desert is where a messiah chooses to make his first appearance. It is a part of the earth which is least earthy Moses, Zoroaster, Christ, Mohammed—they had first appeared on lonesome desert soil.

One night around two o'clock, father unexpectedly came into my room. Usually he would be asleep at that late hour. Unknown to me, my parents were discussing my future education.

"Haven't you gone to bed?" he asked.

I was on edge that evening. When I used to work late at night for my exams, he had not suggested that I should go to bed. Why now? Caustically I replied, "I am improving my mind".

"That's what I came to speak about", he said. "Your mother and I have been discussing you the last few nights. I am not sure whether I will be able to afford it, but we want to send you to Oxford".

"Oxford? You have never mentioned that place to me".

"I know. But I think that is the right university for you"

"Whatever gave you such an extravagant idea?"

"The examiners' report", he replied.

I was quite perplexed. I realised he was planning to give me an education, the cost of which he could not afford. I thought the idea would fizzle out on economic grounds. I replied that I would do as he said. Oxford seemed very far away at that time and my repeating its name to myself did not make it come any closer. After D. J. Sind College with its Principal Shahani, then Principal Bhutani, after T. M. Advani, L. U. Ajwani and Duarte, who were my professors of English, Oxford was not even in my dreams. Some planet must have changed its position, I realised.

However, knowing the pattern of my luck, it was sure to move back into place, back into the House of Obstruction in which Saturn always seems most at home.

Oxford! Matthew Arnold came back to mind. He had called it "home of lost causes and forsaken beliefs". Why go to a place to get lost? And didn't I already have enough beliefs of my own which, to those around me in India, seemed forsaken? On the other hand, this new place may suit me better since so many other Indians before me had found it so frustrating. I felt I would be at home midst frustration. It was my natural environment, one to which I was most accustomed.

At that time I could not have spotted Oxford on a map of England. But then I was never interested in the geographical position of a town or a city. I was, however, aware that I would be on my way to a new home of learning, a new way of thinking, and perhaps a new way of living also.

Father began to work out what Oxford would cost and whether he could afford to give me this education known to be the most expensive. As far as I was concerned, I did not have a clue where to begin. I only had a peculiar feeling that there was a twist in my line of destiny, a bend in the river of my fortune. From the dressing down at the dinner table two or three nights ago to the offer of sending me to Oxford was a sudden change. It was nevertheless typical of the way things were beginning to happen to me.

More coincidences were to occur on the long way from Karachi to Oxford. My father wrote to an Indian friend only because he had published books in England. He in turn wrote to an elderly lady whom he knew in England. Coincidentally, she had a nephew at Oxford. He was the sub-Rector of Lincoln College. So Lincoln it was to which I applied for admission for the Michaelmas term, 1930.

First lessons

I WAS rather shocked when a school friend of mine, slightly older in years than I, broached the subject of sex to me. The place at which this delicate subject was mentioned was the main hall of St. Xavier's School, Bombay, where in the lunch break, volley ball was played. This sermon on sex was delivered in hush-hush tones against the background of the mid-morning chatter and shouting, the normal accompaniment of a boys' school. In addition to volley ball which was in progress, there was leap frog being played in the school compound and the rough Indian game of *dhaba-dhubi*, consisting of bashing up the other fellow with a tennis ball. It was a pointless you-bash-me-I-bash-you game indulged in by those whose development of brawn was ahead of the growth of their brain.

In a setting such as this, resulting from a remark I must have made, the elder boy asked me whether I was fooling or whether I really did not know 'how it happened'.

"What happened?" I asked.

"You know, man and woman, boy and girl".

I had little idea what he was talking about.

Then I was told how man had it and how a woman had something else and what happened thereafter. I was eleven years old and biology was not a subject taught in Indian schools to boys of my age. Times were different from what they are today when a child of five or six speaks of a dog and a bitch being mated and knows what that expression

means. But such talk was never encouraged in my father's house. A child or a puppy was born, that was all. We would be told that auntie had a baby boy or a baby girl. Uncle had nothing more to do with it than to foot the hospital bill. Now, in three instalments, spread over two days, I suddenly came to know the 'facts of life'. It was a clinical, laboratory version of sex. I tucked the newly acquired information at the back of my mind because in a Jesuit school one instinctively knows what is *verboten*.

The first conclusion to which I came was that marriage made sex permissible; all other sex practiced by man could only be with a girl of a lower social station in life, a servant girl, a good looking sweeper woman or a shop assistant. I never dared to cast my roving eye on a Parsi girl. Get thee behind me, Satan — was the formula recommended. How I got such a warped early idea of sex, I have never discovered. But soon my day dream romances with Los Angeles film stars turned to night dreams of sex with the less affluent, working class women of India. But with this mental exercise there also came the fear of disease, knowledge of which was thrown into the extra-curriculum lectures I received from my school friend. I became worried about what I would say to my mother if she were to ask me why I was suddenly itching? That would be intrusion on my privacy. I decided it was best to leave the damn thing alone. As I attained the age of puberty the urges got a trifle bothersome but somehow they found a natural way out.

Eight years later, when I was nineteen and packing to go to England for admission into Oxford the subject of sex was for the first time officially mentioned in my family.^v My father would not speak to me on this subject. It had to be broached to me by an uncle, my mother's brother. As he had once been abroad the delicate assignment was entrusted to him.

He approached it rather sweetly, I thought, with an affectionate pat on my back. He began by saying he envied me my trip abroad and stressed that I would be all alone and could do whatever I wanted. There was a reference

to the pretty girls whom I was sure to meet. "And why shouldn't you?", he added to give me confidence that he was on my side. This was followed by a few awkward questions on whether I had already done 'it' in India. I was non-committal in my answer lest he should rate me somewhat of a boob at the age of nineteen. Perhaps my lack of experience showed on my face for he did not talk around in circles any more. He told me that I should be careful. If I shook hands with a girl, I should make sure I already had 'it' in my pocket. When he told me what 'it' was called, I came to the conclusion that promiscuity was a habit of the French. That was why all the men who had been to Paris went into raptures over it. I was not yet aware that my countrymen who went abroad were so prone to exaggeration.

"Any need to buy these 'its' before I go", I asked my uncle, taking his precaution seriously. I had understood him to say that even a handshake with a girl could produce disease. He assured me there was plenty of stock available in England.

It was on the P. & O. boat, the *Kaiser-I-Hind*, on which I made three of the six voyages between India and England that I ran into a gorgeous little blonde. She was a married woman in her mid-twenties. She was draped in black chiffon; the neck-line of her dress took a deep plunge into her tightly-boxed bosom. I asked her for a dance. The ship was swaying a bit entering the Red Sea. She got up from her circle of friends and danced with me. She danced close, that was what I liked about her. In conversation I found out she was alone on this voyage, with a husband in Calcutta. By the third dance, we were dancing very close together. I asked her only for slow numbers where the rhythm was conducive to a cuddle, leaving her to dance the Charleston with others in her party. Soon I was asked to join her party, made up of just shipmates standing rounds of drinks to each other. I stood a lavish round myself. A small whisky at that time cost ninepence; a gin fourpence half-penny, predecimatisation of course.

At midnight the band stopped playing and soon the circle began to break up. She was in no hurry to go to bed, nor was I. We ordered two more drinks, exchanged personal notes about each other. I did more probing on grounds of precaution to assess the danger, if any, of being sued, blackmailed and so on. All her answers would have satisfied the Yard. I also checked to see there would be no road blocks of conscience or reformist tendencies likely to crop up once the romance which had just begun, got into swing. I did not want it to end up in a glorious misfire resulting in waste of effort and time. But how to make the first move? My uncle had taught me to take precautions, not how to make the approach. I only had knowledge of theory. She must have done it, being married. I gathered she would like to do it and from all available evidence during and after the dance, I had a sporting chance of doing it. But I did not know where to begin.

I nearly hit the jackpot when we discussed where our respective cabins were. Hers was hot, she said, and on 'D' deck. There was also another girl sharing the cabin with her. So that was out. On the other hand, mine was on the promenade deck, a two-berth cabin all to myself. "That must be lovely", she said with adorable English gush.

We talked a bit more but soon the bar was closed. There was nobody around except a table of four finishing a rubber of bridge. "Let's walk, not talk", she said and I jumped up to escort her around the deck. She took my arm as we walked, occasionally resting her golden mop of hair on the shoulders of my well-padded dinner jacket. She remarked how lovely the moon looked over the blue waters. I knew she danced like music; but now she talked like music too.

Karaka's powerful writing is interleaved with his terrific sense of humour. His early chapter *Introduction to Sex* would rate a high place in any anthology of humourists. This is understandable, for Karaka is the only one, ever to be entitled to call himself, "Mr. Punch's Learned Clerk in India", a literary title Malcolm Muggeridge bestowed on him during the latter's editorship of that classic English journal. For *Punch*, Karaka wrote over two dozen articles.

There is evidence of great humility in D. F. Karaka's writing; yet alongside it, there is an abundance of egotism, self-assurance, arrogance, even conceit. Who wouldn't be who had the magnificent dream Karaka has had? The dream he describes for his reader as vividly as if the reader was seeing it himself.

Among those who read the manuscript of this book prior to its publication, Khushwant Singh, Editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, referring to the author as an "epicurean, hedonist and sceptic", wrote: "Like everything else that he has written, it is immensely readable, shorn of verbosity and commanding the reader's attention."

More pithy was the one line comment of Daniel P. Oleksiw, Head of the U.S.I.S. in India, who said: "What a fantastic book!"



I politely closed my knife and fork. She removed the plate and must have reported our brief conversation to the landlady who lived in the basement.

Soon the dear old woman came up, enquiring whether something had gone wrong with my appetite. Perhaps I was a vegetarian and was too shy to say so. She could easily cook vegetarian meals for me. She could even make a curry. She once had an aunt in India who had sent her a recipe. She was sure she could find the recipe though it was ages old. It was rapid fire speech which I did not interrupt. I waited for a break in her monologue and got a few words across, "I merely asked the maid what it was".

"She looked most surprised. "Don't you have it in India?"

"But what is it?", I persisted with my question.

"Kiddens, of course".

"Kittens?" I said, quite appalled.

"Yes, kittens. And I made such a nice brown mushroom sauce to go with it".

"That was very kind of you, but we don't eat kittens in India. We do eat all kinds of meat but not cat's meat", I explained to her, politely of course. I was by now beginning to feel the first gush of nausea.

"Yes, kittens", she said, pronouncing her words in clear English, Oxford landlady style.

It could not be true. We knew hundreds of English people in India, my mother's dinner table was noted for its good food. Turtle soup, I remembered having had; it was expensive and served only on special occasions. Mock turtle soup, also. Lovely crawly Stilton cheese soaked in port—Danish blue was not known then—but never kittens. In fact we never went to a second-rate restaurant in India because of the rumour that some of these cheaper eating

places were not averse to serving a dead cat in mashed up meat.

I pulled myself together and to make sure I had not misheard her, I checked again, "You did say kittens — K-I-T-T-E-N-S, didn't you?"

She nodded her head in positive assent, adding, "It's a delicacy here".

I cut short the conversation. "I'll just have some coffee, nothing more today".

Coffee came and I sat down to write a long lament to my mother. I narrated the whole conversation word by word, ending the first two pages with the words, "You never told me I would ever have to eat kittens in England". I could not finish the letter that evening because I threw up my dinner, delicacy and all. There was no chemist open where I could get something to sooth my revolting stomach. I lay in bed with big tears in my eyes, sniffing away, sorry for myself, sorry I ever came to England, sorry for the poor kittens slaughtered for my sake. I spent a ghastly night, full of nightmares, sobs in my sleep, burps and throw-ups.

The next day I added two more pages of lament, telling my parents that I would not be sorry if I did not get through my entrance exam. "I will be glad to get back home — less education but more civilised food. Please mum, I've had enough already". I posted the letter straight away, walking all the way to the main post office near Carfax after getting it weighed and correctly stamped for air-mail.

At every meal thereafter as soon as the maid left the room after serving me, I would pick up my plate and smell the food before eating it. All stews, mince and meat which was chopped up was suspect. It had to be laboratory checked by my fine sensitive nose and desensitized by a first nibble before I ate it. I must have rejected half a dozen dishes in that way, preferring to go hungry rather than risk another inner revolt.

My mother's reply came by return of post. Even so it took ten days. Calmly she told me I must be 'plain stupid'. She had never been to England herself but she was sure the

English never ate cat's meat. There must be some mistake, some misunderstanding. "Is your landlady hard of hearing? You had better check", she wrote. "I am sure she gave you kidneys in mushroom sauce".

Just like mother, I said to myself. Why should my landlady be deaf? Anyway, I asked the maid when next I saw her whether the landlady had any trouble with her hearing.

"Oh! Yes sir. The poor thing can't hear a word you say. She does lip read most of the time, but she won't say she is deaf. Stone deaf, she is. Oh yes, can't hear a thing".

A little hope came to me. The next time I saw the landlady I thanked her for the lovely dinner she had cooked for me.

"Liked it, did you?"

I said slowly and deliberately, "Very nice dinner".

She was pleased. Then I asked her again what it was she gave me to eat some ten days ago which I didn't like.

"That was kiddens", she said, all over again.

"Kittens?" I repeated, pronouncing the word very clearly. "Yes", she said, confirming once again, "they're a delicacy here".

I felt revolted. It looked as if I was going back to India sooner than my parents intended. But could mother who had called me 'stupid' be so wrong? I called the landlady over to the table where I was working, took a large piece of paper and wrote on it "KITTENS? — CAT MEAT?"

"Naaw", she said. "We don't eat that stuff over here". She was most disapproving of the idea. Shocked at the very thought, she asked me: "You eat that in India?"

"Naaw", I said, heaving a sigh of relief.

"That's what I thought. You are vegetarian".

I agreed with everything she said thereafter. Four days from now I would be out of this deaf and dumb institution and I could eat kidneys again. I was moving fast from the days when sex was only 'it' to now when kidneys were delicacies.

I passed my common entrance exam, was admitted to Lincoln College, Oxford. Term started soon thereafter with a broad grin on the hall porter's face because I had sat in his chair in the porter's lodge which entitled him to recover from me the traditional fine of half-a-crown. I paid. I learned. I was happy because the college buttery provided food I could see and eat with relish. "*Pater noster qui es in coelis sanctificetur nomen tuum.*" the senior scholar would begin grace before dinner each day and with 'Amen' uttered in chorus we would start our evening meal.

There was no time to think of sex in the early days at Oxford. One had to fit into a pattern of life different from that to which I was accustomed. *Justinian*, Mr. Hanbury my tutor told me, was easiest to understand in its original Latin. I took his advice seriously and soon I could read it like an Edgar Wallace novel.

Occasionally an odd freshman would come up to my rooms for a glass of port and ask what I thought of Freud or whether I had read the *Well of Loneliness*? No, I hadn't. I constantly expressed the view that sex should be normal. No one of course knew that my expressions of opinion on sex were based on no experience but as most freshmen were in a similar position, they were inclined to credit me with a great deal of specialised knowledge on this subject. I began to be looked upon as a roué without having qualified to be one. Because of the public school background of most of the undergrads, I stood out as a believer in hetero-sexuality which they dreaded to speak of, much less to approach. Some of them had not so much as held a woman close to them. They were afraid something would happen if they did. To that extent I was ahead of most of them. My luscious day-dreaming with women I had never met, stood me in good stead. The impression grew that I knew more than I spoke of. In a way it was good.

4

Introduction to sex

IT WAS at Christmas that year, 1930, that I first kissed a girl. I still remember her name. It was at Beatenberg above Interlaken. She was at school in Switzerland and I was on my first ski-ing holiday, struggling to balance myself on nursery slopes outside our hotel in moonlight, while the rest of the hotel was dancing after dinner. We sat on a wooden stool called a *lounge* in the snow and kissed each other. Nothing more happened and I never saw her again. She was 17, I was 19.

Back at Oxford for the next term, everyone was sure I had gained in sexual experience. I had, only to the extent of experiencing the feel of a kiss. Nobody would have believed me, nor did I volunteer any information. Reluctance to discuss women with my male friends has stood me in good stead.

Two years passed at Oxford and I was twenty-one. Only one girl at the University made a real friend to me. She was connected with India in her childhood. Although she wore horn-rimmed spectacles, she was most attractive. Physically she had the loveliest body, which was more noticeable in an evening dress. Her vital statistics seemed perfect. She was a beautiful dancer. I dated her for an evening in town during the first days of the next vacation. Douglas Byng was performing in cabaret at the Monseigneur restaurant in Piccadilly. Dressed in my white tie and tails, the normal attire in Oxford in those days, I took her out.

That evening, on good food and good wine I became even more aware of the attraction of this girl. Perhaps I had matured. As she was so close a friend, I was afraid of a misfire because of a clumsy approach. The attraction grew as the evening progressed. She was aware I was attracted. I think she was too. Perhaps she thought I could tackle a situation such as this, that I would know where to go and what to do. Only I knew my limitations. I decided it was time to find out, though not with her. I looked into her eyes fondly as she did into mine. "I'll have one more dance with you", I said, "then I'll drop you home".

"So early?", she protested.

I took her by the hand on to the floor. I danced really close, feeling her warmth against me. I pulled her closer and she yielded to my touch. I saw her lips part, her eyes close. I could almost hear her breathing. When the dance was over, we walked back to our table. I called the waiter and paid the bill.

Back in the cool air of Piccadilly, I hailed a cab. I asked to be driven to the club at which she was staying. She heard me give the address. I sat in the far corner of the cab as we drove off. It was noticeable I wanted to sit apart.

"It was a lovely evening", she said breaking the silence. "I wish it had gone on a little longer".

I patted her hand. "I'll take you out again", I told her. I could not explain any more.

The cabbie pulled up at her club. She took out her door key, said a brief good night and into the building she went. I got back into the waiting cab. I told the driver to take me to Bond Street.

"What number, sir?" the driver asked.

"I'll tell you later", I said. He drove on.

As we turned in from Piccadilly, I slid the glass door between us. "Drive slowly. I am looking for someone nice". He nodded. He had driven others before me with the same idea in their mind.

"Anyone special, sir, or just looking?"

"Just looking".

He drove the cab at crawling pace giving me time to look. Bond Street in 1932 was not as deserted at night as it is now. There was more freedom for women to walk. The shops selling merchandise closed at 5.30 p.m., when another type of business opened up. Women of all shapes, sizes and ages used the entrances to the closed shops in which to wait. A man walking by would stop to talk to one of them, then they would start walking together, sometimes arm in arm. If the conversation did not produce accord, the man would move on, aware there would be another woman waiting to welcome him at the next lamp post. The women in this kind of business were cold and calculating. They earned anything between £100 and £300 per month, which was a fortune in the 1930's. Tax free. The rate prevailing in Bond Street was between a pound and thirty bob. For a five pound note, you could have bed and breakfast comfortably. These were the street walkers, a majority of whom were foreign girls. The French predominated. Unlike Paris, however, they carried no certificates, the yellow cards which were stamped at periodic intervals by the French health authorities to certify that the patient examined by medical authority was free of venereal disease. No one however uttered these words because pre-war Britain believed that the best way to avoid disease was not to speak about it. Only when the war broke out and the men and women enrolled for active service trooped up for their medicals, were huge hoarding signs hung up in Britain with the letters "V. D." writ large on them. The advice then given was: "Go and see a doctor soon". This proved the healthier way.

It was half way up Bond Street against a bright light in the shop-window of a well-known gents' chemisier that I spotted a sylphlike form. Black was the colour fashionable in Bond Street in those days. The younger set wore smartly cut coats trimmed with fur. The more seasoned could even afford a mink which some playboy's girl friend had lost to a pawnbroker's shop. I tapped on the glass window of the taxi. The driver slowed down to a halt and I jumped out.

There was no need for any formality. She called me "*Chérie*" straightway. In the light from the shirtmakers' shop I noticed her make-up was heavy. The eyebrow pencil underlined the wrinkles of her forehead and over her rejuvenated face was a thick, dry paste. But she had a classic profile, accentuated by the black beret she wore at a slant. A French general's daughter, out for free love and romance? It could have been if she had not come so quickly to the point: "*Tu viens avec moi?*"

"*Peut être, peut être*", I replied, bandying French with French, while looking her over. My eyes moved from the face to her shapely, boyish shoulders, then as I glanced at her exquisite feminine form, her upper torso gripped by her closely fitting dress, I could not help noticing how perfectly shaped she was. This was the woman I would slowly undress later that evening, with breasts tapering upwards with innocence, like the Vestal virgins I had read about. There was no need to look beyond her. I put her into my waiting cab, asked her where she lived which was not far from where I had picked her up, and we drove a little faster than before.

As I closed the cab door behind me and told the cabbie where to go, some of the old sermons on sex before leaving India came back to mind. Could a girl who looked so well-bred, dressed so smartly and perfumed like a walking hairdresser's shop, have any disease? It was too late to think of precaution now. I should have stopped at a chemist shop. Now it would be an insult to her. I did not dare.

With two swings of the cab, we were at her doorstep. I stepped out. My coat tails swished in slight excitement. The big moment was on. I paid off the cab, adding a handsome tip for the sympathetic way in which he had helped me solve my problem that evening.

"Thank you, sir", he said, "and I wish you a very good night". Typical of the English. Only a London cab driver could have said so much in so few words and with such restraint.

She took out her key from her shiny black patent leather

handbag, an expensive buy from one of the shops on this expensive street. Then she stopped before opening the door. "*Mon petit cadeau*", she said. The conversation came down to brass tacks. She wanted to know if I was staying the whole night or only for a short time.

The whole night? Oh no, I could not possibly do that. How could I go back in the morning to my private residential hotel, as *pensions* in Bayswater were called, still wearing my stiff dress shirt, butterfly collar, white tie and tails, wearing also the bright lipstick she would smear from her cherry-red lips on to mine?

"Not whole night", I said in English without prepositions, which is more easily understood by the French.

"Not whole night?" There was a sad look on her face. "Okay, then only two pounds". She held out her hand.

I felt embarrassed digging into my hip pocket for my wallet in the open street. I indicated she would have her *cadeau* as soon as we got into the house.

"Ah, non", she said. "Before I openn zi door".

This lack of trust in a respectable Indian's word was somewhat of a blow to my sensitive young soul. I made allowances for her caution because I had not told her who I was and how respectable my father was. Nor would my father have liked his name being mentioned as a credit reference in a situation such as this. It was better to pay her and enter the privacy of her home.

The transaction completed, she put the key into the door and turned it. She switched on the light in the entrance hall, on the walls of which hung 'colourful sketches by French artists. Up a few steps we arrived at the first floor. She opened another door which, to my surprise, led straight to her bedroom. She flung her bag and keys on a double bed which was covered with a sheet which was crumpled with use. I looked on. On her dressing table, which was painted gold, stood a double row of perfume bottles, Coty, Guerlain, Worth, Chanel, all the perfume makers of that period — a large bottle of my mother's favourite, *Mitsouko*, was also there. There was a solid silver set of the quality

Asprey sells; hair-brushes, a hand mirror and a comb. A gorgeously framed painting of a nude hung from the wall. I was staggered at what I saw. It was the boudoir of a woman of taste.

She broke my spell while I had my back to her, with a "*voila*" and I turned around. From top to toe she had unzipped her black dress and it fell apart; her coat was already on the chair. I gaped as she stepped out of her dress which now lay on the floor. It was the only garment covering her body and what stood before me was the first completely naked woman I ever saw. It was a ghastly sight. Her breasts were like punctured balloons hanging down; she had no curves to her bosom at all. As she picked up her dress and flung it on the chair I noticed it had heavy rubber padding in it which I had believed were her natural breasts. Her body was so emaciated she was sheer bone at the hips, the curve of her lower torso was concave not convex, her legs which I had not cared to examine were spindly, with no flesh on them and she had hardly any thighs at all. She did not wear a bra, for there was nothing to support. She wore no pants for they would have dropped off in the street as she paced up and down. Her highly made-up face showed how anaemic she was, white and bloodless. Only her varicose veins showed she had blue blood. It was sad to see a woman, so emaciated. I was still fully clothed in my white tie and tails. I was mute with shock. Thinking or speaking was a process difficult to achieve at a moment such as this. "Come", she said, lying down on the bed, flat on her back, ready for love.

I hastily started talking; how fascinated I was by her lovely flat, I said. I started to look around. "That picture is lovely", I pointed to the nude on the wall. By now all thought of sex had been drained out of me. My manhood had shrivelled.

"You no like?" She was referring to herself for I had not taken a single garment off my back. I did not have the nerve to undress. Here was a naked woman, but who was in the room next door? I had heard of toughs springing

out on situations as delicate as this, bashing men up, robbing them of what they possessed — wallet, watch, fountain pen, then chucking them out into the street in a semi-conscious state. I tried to recollect what money I had left on me. There could not have been more than five pounds left. That was not much to lose. I had a stainless steel watch, a silver cigarette case. That was all. But what if the tough gang got annoyed because I possessed nothing more?

"Show me your lovely house", I suggested, playing for time.

"You like house more than you like me?" came her reply in a kittenish voice.

I told her I liked both. "You French and lovely; your *maison*, lovely and French".

Very clever boy, I thought I was. At first it worked. She got up, naked of course, and opened the side door. "I show", she said. She led the way, I followed.

It was a living room, exquisitely furnished. I doubt if any other man had ever asked to see it or shown interest in anything more than her bed and her much used body. To that extent she must have been pleased. She had four built-in glass cabinets filled with bibelots. As she passed the one filled with porcelain, she announced what it was. Sevres, then on to Dresden, then an eyeful of Lalique glass which I recognised before she told me what it was.

"You know Lalique?"

I nodded, saying I had it *chez moi*, a completely bogus claim but who was to know?

The fourth was of antique silver. Some of the pieces looked as if they were from George III's dining table. A pair of candelabra was the showpiece of this cabinet. If the stately homes of England cost five shillings to look over, this intimate view of a prostitute's flat in London was fully worth the two pounds I gave her before she let me in.

As enough time had passed and she had been humoured by my compliments on the decor of her apartment, it was time to call it a day.

"Come", she said again, moving towards the bedroom

door. But I stayed on in the living room which I thought was safer.

"*Chérie*", I said, "tonight, I very tired. So I go.. Next time I spend whole night with you".

"You no want me for *amour*?"

I emphasised the lateness of the hour. It was a quarter to two.

"I no good for you?" She was getting unduly sensitive and I was not over-anxious to stay. It seems I had wounded her professional pride. She rushed towards me and embraced me, naked as she still was. She tried to kiss me on my lips though unsuccessfully. I let her plant kisses on my cheek instead. "Lovely boy," she said with a kind of fire I had not seen in a woman's eyes ever before. "But I want loave", she added.

"*Tres fatigué*" was the angle I kept stressing. "*Tres, tres fatigué*". She could not have cared less if I were half dead, she indicated, getting really frantic in her approach. "*Quel brun!*", she exclaimed, "*magnifique!*" The 'brun' was my light brown skin. On her last holiday in the South of France she became 'brun-er' than I, she informed me. Her 'boy friend', gave her a thousand pounds to have her for that fortnight in Cannes. He bought her lovely clothes and paid all her expenses just to have her. "*Tu es un idiot*", she said. I think the point she was making was that I was foolish to let the opportunity pass when I could have her that night for only two pounds. She would make beautiful love; she guaranteed that.

There I tripped up. I let slip a little detail of information which endangered my safety. I informed her I was sure she would give me beautiful love because I had never made love to a woman before.

That did it. It sealed my doom. To a professional at her age, the thought of having a young virgin boy was a new thrill which she would not let go. The next few moments were tense. She rushed through to her bedroom, grabbed her handbag, pulled out the two pounds I had given her and held them out for me to take back.

I told her they were hers whether I made love or not. I said that looking at her flat was in itself worth more. She tried to put the notes into my coat pocket and when I would not let her, she tried to put them into the pockets of my trousers, grabbing me, kissing me, pulling my bow-tie, undoing the buttons of my waistcoat. I was in the grip of a female cobra. Already she had transferred half her make-up onto my face, breathed gasps of passion over me, planted huge lipstick marks all over my face, licked my ears, pulled out my shirt front. As I looked at myself in the mirror, I felt I had been mauled in a wrestling match. In the scramble that ensued, she had succeeded in putting one of the pound notes into my pocket, the other lay crumpled on her French carpet. She looked dangerously frantic now. It was not a situation I was accustomed to handle. She grabbed a stiletto which lay close at hand.

"You come with me?" she asked in a seductive voice.

"You don't want me tomorrow — for whole night", I pathetically repeated.

She shook her head. "*Ce soir*", she said. Tomorrow was another day as far as she was concerned. She was more intelligent than I thought.

With a shrug of my shoulders, I said it would be as she wished. To ease the tenseness of the moment, I moved closer to her to indicate I was not afraid of the knife in her hand. I spouted a few *cherries* at her, kissing her fondly on her neck but studiously avoiding the lips. She did not know I was saying lines of my Parsi prayers invoking divine help because of the situation in which I had landed myself. I was not frightened of getting killed, but I was worried what my parents would say about the battlefield on which I had chosen to die.

I went back to her bedroom as I was told to do. Back on the bed she got in the position most familiar to her. She told me to take off my clothes. This I started to do, asking whether I could keep my stiff shirt on and my white tie, now sodden with lipstick. She did not mind. I sat at the edge of her bed and she went into an ecstasy so loud that I was

afraid she would wake up the neighbours or if a policeman were on his beat, he would stop over to check if all was well in this house with its lights full on, its silk curtains drawn.

She motioned me to lie beside her. As I did, she reeled off the names of all her holy saints, by way of thanksgiving I presume. The question was whose prayers would be more powerful, hers or mine. She rushed the tapes and wrapped her naked body around my loins. That did it. That which should have happened much later, happened right away, because of the touch of her flesh. Lack of experience, I suppose. It could have brought no physical satisfaction to her; only the pyrrhic victory was hers. She was content to believe she was attractive enough to have exhausted me.

My getting back quickly into my clothes was not resented. She told me I must come again, spend a whole night with her. Many whole nights, she suggested. I assured her that was uppermost also in my thoughts. I put the pound she had shoved into my pocket back on her dressing table, the other one was still on the carpet in the next room. I said a friendly '*bon soir*' together with an '*au revoir*' and beat it as fast as I could.

I closed the door behind me and with hurried steps I walked to the main road where a taxi was moving towards me. I jumped in, murmuring my prayers. As I returned to my most respectable private residential hotel in Bayswater, it was 3 a.m.

"Never again" were the last words I uttered as I turned into bed. This was the conclusion to which, at the age of twenty-one, I came. But for the fact that Venus in my horoscope was powerful at the time of my birth and stayed that way through my life, this sordid introduction to sex may have shattered my abiding faith in womanhood. I waited for a *yog* more favourable to love.

Mr. President, sir

OXFORD IS Gothic. That was the first thing I realised soon after I got there. It radiated power. Causes were not lost here as was widely believed, beliefs were not so easily forsaken. Instead, they were zealously pursued, staunchly defended. In terms of education, Oxford had deep wells of knowledge and learning. The wells were there from which to drink. No one would be pushed into them.

I read law at Oxford. My tutor was Mr. Hanbury, the great authority on Equity. The system at Oxford was that an undergraduate belonged to an individual college. Here his tutor guided him, but the lectures he attended were held by the University as a whole, not by the individual college. That was the form. I believe it is still the same.

Everything began smoothly and according to plan. At the end of my first year, when my father checked with my tutor on the progress I had made, he was informed to his great satisfaction that I had worked extremely well. It seems Mr. Hanbury made the rash prophecy that if this progress continued, he was sure I would get a First at the end of my third year. But something happened to the smooth flow of progress between then and the day two years later, when my tutor had hurriedly to despatch another letter to my father, informing him that an honours degree was now quite out of the question. I had not worked, he said. I had been distracted by other pursuits. He added:

that he even doubted whether I would get an ordinary degree. There were ten weeks to go and I received a long cable from home followed by a longer letter expressing the great disappointment they felt at the 'tragic news' they had received.

I got down to serious work — eight hours a day for the first four weeks. I stepped up the work schedule to a twelve-hour day for the next four weeks, fourteen hours for the ninth week, sixteen per day in the week before 'schools'¹. It was not difficult. When the results were out, I got a very high second class. I had put in some flashy papers, particularly on the law of Torts, a Latin word meaning "wrongs" — the law of crime in fact. My answers on defamation, libel and slander were exceptionally good. Only in international law I was found to be weak. Despite this erratic performance, I was *viva-ed* for a First, but they could not give it to me. At the *viva-voce*, I was asked how long I had worked on international law. I had to reply, "Just a night before the exam, sir". If my father had ever got to know of this, he would probably have skinned me alive.

But I got something else out of Oxford which no Indian before me did. I became President of the Union. That pleasurable distinction in addition to the second in the law final, rated higher in my estimation than an ordinary First which so many studious undergraduates monotonously obtain year after year. In point of time, this plum of undergraduate life came in my fourth year. I stayed up for it, even though I had only an outside chance of being elected. My parents readily agreed the gamble was worth taking.

The election as I foresaw it, was to have been fought out between David Graham, who had been the librarian a term before me and myself, who was the librarian in office. The librarian ranks next to the President in the Oxford Union hierarchy. While I would get the official nomination which

¹The Oxford way of referring to the final exam.

meant being proposed by the retiring President, David having held the same office before me had seniority in his favour. I rated his chances superior to mine. The fight seemed to lie only between the two of us.

David had, however, become deeply involved in the Oxford Group movement just then, the movement which is now called Moral Re-armament or M.R.A. A few days before the nominations for office at the Union closed, David was coming down the steps of the Union taking two at a time with his abundant energy. Then he walked at my slower pace, alongside me. "Hail", he said, "how is the next President of the Oxford Union?"

"Don't be funny, Mr. Graham", I replied. "You've got it cold".

"No, you'll get it", he said. "I'm not standing and I see no one else".

We both came to halt. "Yes", he said, "let me hail you as the next President."

I was worried about what he had said. "Not standing" would only imply that something had gone wrong for him. No one would otherwise miss the election to this plum office of the undergraduate world, especially when he had the best chance.

"Has anything gone wrong?" I asked.

"No", he replied in his jerky, languid way, "nothing has gone wrong. I am not standing, that's all".

I felt he was only pulling my leg, giving me false confidence in my chances of success. "Why ever not?"

"If you must know", he said a little shyly, "I have had guidance not to stand".

I knew then he was serious. Guidance, to those who are in this movement, is a sort of revelation of the will of God. I said nothing more. There was nothing I could say. I wondered who would oppose me now. How did such strange coincidences occur?

Earlier that term, as Michael Foot was President, it was his prerogative to plan the debates and the speakers for each of the eight weeks of his term of office. He had chosen for

the opening day a subject then nearest to his heart, liberalism. It is not any more. As M.P. for Ebbw Vale, the seat the Labour party bequeathed to him on Mr. Aneurin Bevan's death, Mr. Michael Foot stands today at the extreme left. The motion for debate he had chosen for the opening day was something like. "This House believes that Liberalism is not dead". He had written to me during the vacation, asking me to move the resolution, which in this instance meant being the first speaker in the first term of the academic year. Being an Indian, I did not relish the idea of speaking on Britain's domestic politics at the start of a new term which was to be so vital to me. Michael seemed anxious that I should and since he was the President, I conformed with his wishes.

It was a full-dress debate with a distinguished guest invited. He was the eminent criminal lawyer, Mr. Norman Birkett, later raised to the Bench and the peerage. Mr. Birkett's name had figured in a number of sensational criminal cases just about the same time. He was a brilliant counsel for the defence. Big crime always catches the eye of the London press and Mr. Birkett after his several successes was then at the top of the criminal Bar.

It was customary for the opening speaker to introduce the guest of the evening. Therefore, in my opening remarks, I welcomed him — all the more, I said, because of his clear-cut brain and his perfect advocacy which was on our side of the House. Mr. Birkett, by his perfect analysis of the evidence before us will, I am sure, save so much time and argument. "In fact, Mr. President, saving time for his fellow men is quite a speciality of his". Birkett had just won a big case; the accused was acquitted. The applause from a full house which had come to hear him was fulsome. It was in the same vein that I spoke for the twenty minutes allotted to me, a speech full of quips and cracks and of what the Union always appreciated, epigrams. I said very little about Liberalism; I skirted around the subject of the debate.

Preparing for this speech, I had a problem. There was a joke I had heard during the vacation just ended. It was

admittedly corny but it had a Marx Brothers' flavour about it, a touch of adorable stupidity which I can never resist. When I first heard it, I had rocked with laughter and when I retold it to others during the same vacation, it had produced a similar result. But I was not sure that it would go down at the Oxford Union where the humour, as in *Punch*, is simple in form but needs sophisticated appreciation. Not quite sure of my own judgment on this joke, I told it to Michael and asked whether I should use it. It was a flat 'No' from Michael Foot. He reminded me that this was the term in which I would be standing for President, and "a joke like this will kill any chance you may have".

The House that evening was following my every word with close attention. Being the first debate of the academic year, the House was open to all freshmen. It is the only day in his undergraduate career, that a newcomer can get free admission. Thereafter, he has to decide whether he wishes to become a member of the Union or not. Non-members were not admitted to the House.

Midway through my speech which was going extremely well, I got a tremendous urge to tell my rejected joke. I thought the audience had given me the confidence I needed to get away with it. Ignoring Michael's advice, I began to work the joke into my speech. Only the President knew what I was about to do. He was pale as a sheet. The look on his face indicated his fear that I was killing any chance I may have later that term. But I had the floor. I also had the audience with me. So I let them have the joke, ignoring all friendly cautions and warnings. The house rocked with laughter, it re-rocked and rocked again.

There were only two people in the house who did not laugh, Michael Foot in the chair and I on the floor. I had to wait a while before the laughter and the subsequent long applause died down before I could resume my speech. Soon thereafter, I concluded. As soon as I returned to my chair which was on the President's right, a step below his, Michael whispered. "If I were you I would not make another speech till the Presidential". He added somewhat

impertinently I thought, "I don't think you'll ever make as good a speech again". Later at the President's supper which follows the debate, at which port and sandwiches are served, he came up to me and quietly said. "Did you give me the creeps? I thought it was the end — your end. I would not have risked it myself. But how it went down!" I found that quality extremely likeable in Michael Foot. If someone else scored, he was pleased. Except for one individual, that was generally true of the Oxford Union.

My joke as well as my opening remarks about Norman Birkett were quoted all over Oxford for days thereafter. Undergraduates began to get curious who this Indian at the Union was, whose speech was so widely discussed. New members who came to the subsequent debates hoped they would hear this Indian speak again, perhaps intervening in a debate as one frequently did. But I stayed glued to my librarian's chair, faithfully following Michael's advice. Only when the President left the hall and I had to deputise for him, regulate the timing of the speakers and call upon the next member to address the house, was my voice heard. It was what the librarian as acting President, had to do. But I did not say a word more than was required for this routine. I waited for the presidential debate in which the candidates standing for that office are automatically invited to speak.

Although debates at the Oxford Union were reported only by the university magazines, the *Isis* and *Charwell*, in 1933 when I was its secretary, the Oxford Union hit the headlines not only of the London press but I think of almost the whole world. It was the debate on the fateful night of February 9 of that year, when the Union passed, by a handsome majority, the motion which has since become notorious, "This House will under no circumstances fight for its King and Country". It came to be commonly known as the 'pacifist' resolution. My main connection with it was that as secretary of the Union, the minutes of this debate were written in my handwriting. The original minutes were torn out of the minute book after an unseemly exhibition,

led by someone who being now dead, need not be mentioned. But I re-wrote the minutes which still stand in the minute book. Since then, there has been a world war, in which many of those who supported the resolution not only fought but died.

Typical of the storm that was raging was the editorial comment of the *Daily Express*, which expressed its utter contempt with the words, "Even the plea of immaturity, or the irresistible passion of the undergraduate for posing, cannot excuse such a contemptible and indecent action as the passing of that resolution". This did not worry any of us. The *London Times*, reluctant to devote serious comment for or against, and unable to ignore the resolution that was passed, headed its editorial "Children's Hour". It said: "... To those who are determined to take the result of the debate *au grand sérieux*, let it be some consolation that the Union is in no sense representative of the University, that (despite the eminent persons who have used it as a training ground for Parliament) it has always been liable to fall into the hands of a little clique of cranks, that a great body of undergraduates live their life at Oxford without ever concerning themselves about its activities..."

The *Manchester Guardian*, representing progressive England said: "... Not a word, in columns of abuse, which even mentions (let alone sympathises with) the obvious meaning of this resolution — youth's deep disgust with the way in which past wars 'for King and Country' have been made, and in which, they suspect, future wars may be made..."

The Oxford Union which was born in 1824, is, however, not to be judged or remembered only by this single debate which took place a hundred and nine years later. The 'King and Country' resolution was only one debate. It is of no real interest now, almost four decades after that resolution was passed. The reaction of Oxford at the time was more interesting. Freedom of speech is the birth-right of a free man and freedom has no meaning if it exists only in a vacuum, or in mere theory. The Union

had exercised its freedom of speech. Right or wrong, we had said something, which was thought provoking, storm raising. That most of those who spoke in favour of it, including myself, may have changed our opinion about pacifism when the war broke out, was a different matter. The minutes of the debate held on February 9, 1933, had to be a faithful record of the proceedings of that evening. And so they were.

The manner of speaking at the Union has varied through the years. Epigrams were at their peak when Philip Guedella¹ uttered them, exquisitely polished, like the nails of a well-groomed model before she takes the floor at a top-grade fashion show. But humour, sophisticated and raw, has run through every generation. It will continue to be applauded so long as humour is available to applaud.

One of the best examples of humour in my time was the opening remark of an undergraduate who said, "I have heard many funeral orations in my time, never have I heard one delivered by the corpse itself". He was welcoming Sir Herbert Samuel, an apostle of the Liberal Party, as Home Secretary in Mr. Ramsay Macdonald's socialist oriented national government.

On Guy Fawkes night, 1931, a New Zealander, Freddie Bucher, caused a long, continuous roar of laughter with his speech, which began, "The late Mr. Guy Fawkes, interviewed on the fifth of November, said he wanted to give politics a hell of a kick in the pants". The words had even greater meaning for us at the time for they had just been used by a parliamentary candidate during the general election as justification for his entry into politics. Almost every debate produced laughter and applause. That was the pleasure one got out of attending the debates, a greater pleasure when one was participating in them.

So we came to the presidential debate of Michaelmas term 1933. The motion for debate on this day conformed to the traditional pattern, a motion of confidence or no

¹ Author of *The Hundred Years*

confidence in His Majesty's Government. It was a no-confidence motion which I had to propose with J. R. D. Crichton, Balliol, who was the treasurer, opposing it. Crichton was also seeking election as President. Aubrey Herbert, an ex-President, spoke third on my side, and the star turn of the evening was the Right Honourable Sir John Simon, P.C., M.P., then Foreign Secretary. Naturally he opposed.

I decided to make a serious speech on this occasion as different from the Birkett evening. Crichton decided to do the opposite. I was lucky in that I gauged the mood of the house more correctly. The next evening when votes were counted, I was some seventy-five votes ahead, a decisive win in terms of the Union's active membership. Crichton immediately congratulated me. It was he who first observed, "You'll make headlines tomorrow". I laughed him out. It was just an election between two students, nothing more.

But Crichton was right. There was not a single known paper in the world which missed carrying this seemingly unimportant news-item. I was made the first Indian, the first Asiatic, the first coloured man and so on — to hold this office. If it was a paper in darkest Africa, it claimed me as "a coloured man". If it was a newspaper in Manila, Hongkong, Singapore, Tokyo, Peking, it claimed me as "the first Asiatic". The Indian press naturally referred to me as "the first Indian".

I know what this victory at Oxford meant to me. Understandably, I was happy to get the unofficial rating of being regarded, for at least a term as the first undergraduate among four thousand students at Britain's premier university. This is how the President of the Union rates during his term of office. I had little idea that it also had so much significance to so many million "coloured men" all over the world, "to whom", as I said in my farewell speech "this colour bar has been a living hell".

With the flow of praise and abuse that appeared in the London press after my election, much the same as that which followed the "King and Country" debate, the Union became more conscious of my existence as term opened than it may

otherwise have been. It was the summer term, over which I presided, with the rowing festival, known as Eights Week, still to come. I decided to set the pace for a festive mood by inviting a professional humourist, Gillie Potter, to be the guest of the first debate.

Mr. Potter was delighted. Never before had "a funny man" addressed the Oxford Union. He had an engagement in Brighton, he said in his letter accepting my invitation, but he had arranged with a well-known British racing motorist, the Earl of Howe, to drive him over. He may be a little late, Potter said.

Punctuality was sacrosanct at the Union. In all the terms before mine, the President and the officers had walked in precisely at 8 p.m. Occasionally they may have been a minute late, never noticeably more. Later Mr. Potter had second thoughts about being driven by the Earl of Howe and finally decided to arrive by a train which would get in at Oxford at 8.10 p.m. Four minutes would be enough to bring him over to the Union. That would make it 8.14 p.m. British Railways were proud of their record of keeping time in those days. No railwayman in our time ever heard of a 'go slow'. Drop dead yes, never go slow. However, I was taking no chances. Looking up the rules of the Oxford Union Society, I found that by giving due notice the President had power to change the time of the debate. I therefore moved it from 8 to 8.15 p.m. for that evening.

No one noticed the change on the notice board. The hall and the gallery were overflowing by 8 o'clock. It was the first time an Indian was presiding over the Oxford Union and also the first time that a well-known comedian was addressing it. Which drew the crowd was difficult to tell. I would be inclined to yield to Mr. Potter.

The train arrived on time and we got Mr. Potter into the President's office by 8.15 but then Mr. Potter wanted to have a wash and then he began to say he was feeling nervous. He wanted a drink to steady his nerves. Finally he said he had to be photographed in order to show it to his friends. As a result, when I walked in to take the chair

for the first time, with the usual procession trailing behind me and rang the bell, uttering the words of authority, "Order, Order", it was 8.22 p.m.

We quickly went through the usual preliminaries. I called upon the Secretary to read the minutes of the last meeting. I asked if there were any questions or objections pertaining to those minutes. As there were no questions, I declared the minutes carried. I called upon the Librarian to bring forward his weekly list of books. Purchase of books for the Union Library has to be sanctioned by the House. Any questions or objections? There being no questions or objections, I declared the weekly list of books carried.

Then came the traditional question: Are there any questions of officers relating to the discharge of their official duties? We very rarely had any questions asked on this score. I expected none that day, for term had just begun. There was no time for anyone to have done anything wrong. But up jumped an English undergraduate member, whose identity was unknown to me. "Yes sir", he said, his voice ringing out in the silence of that crowded hall, "may I ask why today's debate has been postponed from the usual hour of 8 to 8.15?" The obvious answer was that under such and such a rule the President has power to do this so long as he gives the required notice, which I had done. But the applause he got for asking the question was not a good omen for me. I remembered that one of the Beaverbrook papers, commenting on my election had said "Now that an Indian has been elected President, the Oxford Union will not be the same". Was someone trying to prove this on the opening day? I waited for the applause to die down. Then I replied, "As you are aware, sir, this House must break with tradition in its effort to create a brave new world". The words I used were taken from the motion I had chosen for debate to suit the visit of Gillie Potter. *Brave New World* was the title of Aldous Huxley's book which had just come out and which was extremely popular. I got my share of applause just as much as the questioner had done. The Union was always very fair in apportioning

applause. Good question, good applause. Good or clever retort, again good applause. The honours were thus evenly divided between the questioner who represented the House and the President, who represented its democratically elected authority.

Quite pleased with not having yielded an inch of official ground, I stood up more confidently to ask: "Are there any further questions of officers relative to the discharge of their official duties?" As I stood, I surveyed the scene of my triumph, but only for a brief moment. From the back of the hall, a little Indian got up, my own countryman, and in a little voice and in an accent which only I recognised, asked, "Yes, sir. Was it also in your effort to break with tradition that you came in seven minutes late?"

As he sat down, this tiny little fellow brought down the House in roars of laughter. He was very sumptuously applauded. While the colour conscious could not produce even a small stick with which to beat the authority of the chair, this little Indian had provided an oversize bamboo to lay low his own countryman. It was worse than what Brutus had done to Ceasar. He captured the House and got three full rounds of applause.

I allowed the applause to run itself out while I thought what I could possibly say in reply. The applause was so long, I had enough time to say my prayers, if I had wanted. To have laid the blame on the guest of the evening would have been in very poor taste. Nor would it have been acceptable as a valid reason for the conduct of the proceedings was, for that one term, my sole responsibility. I sat in my chair and waited till all was quiet. Then I got up. My head was a little bowed and there was no look of triumph on my face. I said, "You, sir, should be aware I *am* the latest thing in Presidents". I sat down.

The Union liked that reply. That which was simmering below, I had brought to the surface. I had also been more gracious in my reply to my countryman than he had been to me with his shattering, almost unanswerable question.

I do not remember what happened in the next few

moments, for it was the greatest applause I ever heard. They cheered and they cheered, some standing up to cheer, and they went on cheering. I rang the bell to call for order but, ignoring it, they continued to cheer. I rang the bell again more firmly and called the House to order. Once again I asked: "Are there any further questions of officers..." Before I could finish, the House laughed. It was mellow, friendly laughter. It implied that no one would venture to ask me a question ever again. For the rest of my term, no one did. That is what was so beautiful about the Oxford Union. Once authority was accepted, discipline followed as a matter of course. They challenged, they lost.

Oxford to me was more than a university. To those who have hovered beneath its spires, it is a way of life. As the spires are Gothic architecturally, its way of life is Gothic too, mentally, morally, spiritually, physically.

From the sublime . . .

IN MY horoscope the Lord of the Ridiculous appears to have revelled in sitting next to the Lord of the Sublime. What the equivalent Sanskrit names for these two venerable gentlemen are, I would not know. The transition from the House of one to the House of the other was because the fence between them was permanently down. Trespass, when condoned, is a sign of good neighbourly relations in the zodiac world.

I became conscious of the new role I had to play in that, by force of circumstance, I had become a symbol of the triumphant coloured man. After Oxford I delighted in coming across landladies in London who would look at me wondering whether they should open their restricted apartment houses to me at £3.10.0. a week or not. I was not aggressive or rude. Sensing such a dilemma, I would politely say, "You have extremely nice rooms but I am afraid I am looking for something just a little better".

One good woman volunteered the information that she only took English people into her tenement. It was a newly painted house just off Lancaster Gate. I confused her by saying, "I don't blame you. Some of these foreigners do make an awful mess". After that we got on fine. Then, hat in hand and about to leave, I said, "But I will give your address to some of my friends who want some really nice, reasonably priced rooms such as you have".

"That would be very kind of you".

As I thought she might change her mind if only as an experiment of a special case, I hurriedly blocked my own entry, saying, "Actually two or three rooms of yours would still save me a lot, compared to what I am paying now" I had to add, "But you see, some of us, foreigners", I avoided identifying my particular strain, "can't live in three rooms all alone". That, of course, created two problems for her: one was colour, the other the hint of women.

As that remark drew no puritan retaliation, I went on to tell her about my non-existent problems. "Frankly can't afford to marry any more wives. Father has his harem, of course, but I can't have my lot go berserk at Bourne and Hollingsworth. They'd want to buy up every brassiere in the shop. Cheaper to let them roam around where they do now", I concluded, giving her a glimpse of a palace in my unidentified oriental land. Poor father! He only had eyes for my mother and never so much as looked at another woman in his life. When she went, some years before him, he had very little else for which to live.

The landlady in Bayswater was really out of her depth by then. It was also time for me to cut short this futile conversation. Nonsense is more difficult to talk than sense. "Don't worry", I said, "I'll send you someone really nice. Really English and public school. And you'll have no trouble about women".

Situations such as these are summed up by the juxtaposition of two ancient Indian words, 'Brahmaputra Kamasutra'. The first of these is the river in the north-east of India which the Chinese call San Po; the second is an encyclopaedia on the art of making love which a painstaking *pandit* by the name of Vatsayana produced, reviving the lost art of the natives.

With that I left the Bayswater landlady. No wonder some of my friends ask, "When will you grow up?" But that is because a great many people believe it is not enough that the mind of a man has matured. There must be visual evidence of maturity. This I have always had great difficulty in producing. I believe that a man,

if he so chooses, can live in separate mental compartments. All that is needed is the power of concentration, an ability to make a quick break-away from the last subject of thought. It requires flexibility of the mind, natural in some cases, acquired in others. These qualities are more important and more difficult to acquire than a serious outlook, a dignified stance or a thinker's pose. Yet more people are impressed by the look of maturity than by maturity itself.

For instance, in *yoga*, the easiest pose is the head stand yet it appears the most dramatic and the most difficult. I did it once in the aisle of a super constellation, returning from an inaugural flight from Cairo. Thirty thousand feet above sea level, everyone was most impressed. But these yogic poses do not alter the composition of the brain. Indian *yoga* has its uses, just as ju-jitsu or weight-lifting. It is a form of development of the body but often at the expense of neglect of the brain. A world which has a place for morons in human society is prone to carve out a niche for the super-moron.

The Indian student in England was a great deal happier than he seems to be today. While we adored mooching around England, India was home for us. Towards the end of each month we would be broke. Our student allowance of £30 a month was generous to live on, eat on and occasionally even smoke a cigar on, for those were the days when a good cigar cost only a shilling, considered expensive in terms of the prevailing cost of living. When the Labour party came to power, an imported cigar was heavily taxed as a luxury. Its price shot up by fifty per cent to 1/6d. Shocking we said, but continued to smoke them on days of festival or celebration as we had done before.

In the autumn of 1968 after lunch with a friend at a well-known restaurant in the Strand, I was collecting my hat and coat downstairs. In a shop whose window opened into the restaurant lobby I saw, neatly displayed, a box of Havana cigars, my favourite student brand. "Ah", I exclaimed, "there's my old friend". To the attendant in the

shop I said, "I think I'll have one of these". I looked admiringly at it. Revolutions may have occurred in Cuba, but the old cigar looked still the same.

"Will you smoke it now, sir?" the attendant asked.

"I think I will".

Carefully she pierced the end for me. "There you are, sir", she said. I put it in my mouth, lit it and drew a few delightful puffs of smoke. I pulled out my wallet and asked how much I owed her.

"That will be seventeen and six", she said.

The cigar almost popped out of my mouth, on to the floor. "Seventeen shillings and six pence", she carefully repeated. I gave the attendant a one pound note and asked the good woman to keep the change.

Money had more value in the London of our student days. A half-crown was enough for an evening meal at the Corner House at Marble Arch, which is where I was going one evening, from my digs in near-by Gloucester Place. I was engrossed in my thoughts as I stepped out on the street, having closed the main door behind me. A half-crown was all I had on me that day.

I had hardly walked a few steps when I passed an old man begging for alms, rare in London and hardly ever seen around our locality. As I passed clear of him, I thought I heard him say something special to me. I stopped and listened without turning round. Then I clearly heard his words, "No ope listens to me tonight". I turned. He was not speaking to me. His face was turned up to the sky. Without much thought of what I was doing, I put my hand in my pocket. He saw me. "Thank you, sir", he said, even before I had given him anything.

With my hand in my pocket I realised that the only coin I had was a half-crown for my own dinner. I could not ask him for change and it would have been cruel to walk on. I had no alternative but to give it to him. He was profuse in his thanks when in the street light he looked at that coin. Giving it was no trouble, but there was now no point in walking on to the Corner House. Mr. Joe Lyons,

who owned it, only served food for cash. I decided to inhale a little fresh air into my smoke-filled lungs, take a walk around the square and return to my digs for early bed. Sidney, the butler at our digs would bring me breakfast the next morning and that would go on the bill.

Leisurely I paced Gloucester Square, looking over the symmetry of its un-Gothic architecture, each house as monotonously respectable as the other with most of the front doors painted black, the numbers of the houses in well-polished brass figures; it was a typical London upper-middle class residential square. Nice people lived there. I must have walked a whole hour before I returned home.

While I was out, the postman had delivered the 9 o'clock mail. There was an air-mail letter from India for me. The handwriting I had not seen for over two years; it was that of a grand-aunt of mine. Daughter of Dosabhai Framji, who had received Edward on the shores of India, she was weeping in her dream the night before I was born. In that dream, her father had appeared to her. "Why are you crying, Shirin?" he asked. She told him she was unhappy because he had gone and left her behind. It was many years after his death, but the dream occurred the night before I was born. "Don't cry, my daughter", he told her, "I am coming back to you, I am coming back". The next day I was born. Because she believed the dream to be true, she regarded me all through her life, as her father re-born. Her letter was brief, written in nice, rounded letters. Her English was simple and to the point. "I suddenly remembered that for your last three birthdays I have sent you no present. Herewith thirty pounds". With love, she signed her name.

How sweet! Thirty pounds in postal orders! That was a full month's allowance as an unexpected gift. I could now go out and have a full meal. It would not be the Corner House with £30 in my pocket. A wash, a clean shirt, a suit that was pressed and I was out again, on my way to dinner. I fed well at the Monseigneur bar in Jermyn Street on *escalope de veau Holstein, pommes lyonnaise*.

épinard purée à la crème, café. The cost, with tip, was a pound. I then went to a night club in Soho, ordered a bottle of Scotch, danced with a pretty little girl, paid the bill, gave her two pounds as a tip, and when I returned to Gloucester Place, I still had £23 left and a few shillings. I felt like a lord.

When I woke up the next day it was quite late. I reviewed the evening I had spent as I sipped a hot cup of coffee. I remembered I had overheard a conversation in the gents' cloak room the night before between two men who while spending their pennies were discussing the racing of the next day. I had no idea who they were. All I heard as I washed my hands and brushed my hair, was that each was confident of winning with the horse he named. I turned to the racing page of the morning paper, rang my little bookmaker and backed a pound win on a double of the two horses.

That afternoon I was going with George, an Oxford friend, to play squash in order to sweat out the booze of the night before. Before leaving my house, I put a call through to the bookmaker as the first leg of my double had been run. I had hardly said "Hello" when the bookie, recognising my voice, said, "You got the first leg. 9 to 1".

A bit dazed at what I heard, I said, "Excuse me, I have backed. . . ."

"I know", he cut me short. "You got the first leg. It's won. 9 to 1. Now a tenner goes on the second leg. Hope it wins". Bang he put down the phone.

Ten pounds on a horse! That's a lot of money I thought. I had never had a bet so large. My friend who came to collect me said there was no need to worry. "You'll probably lose, but then, what the hell, you only lose a quid in all".

That much I knew. He did not have to tell me the mechanics of betting on horses. It was one of those exercises we used to indulge in at school in India when we backed ten annas on a horse, the equivalent of the old ten pence. But until the second leg was run which was in the last race at 5 o'clock, I was making a £9 profit. If I could only hold

back some of it, my expenses of the night before would be covered. I rang the bookmaker again and put the proposition to him. "Let £3 run on the second leg and hold the rest".

"Sorry sir, a double's a double. Can't be changed". He put down the phone. I was left holding the receiver in my hand and my comment, 'Cocky little bastard' he never heard. With an uncooperative fellow like that, there was little I could do.

My friend looked up the racing page of his paper and gave me the consoling news that one paper had tipped it. That was the organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain! "What do commies know about horse racing?" I said.

It was time to catch the bus to the squash courts and we pushed off pretty soon thereafter. I played a bad game all afternoon, losing the first three sets in a row. I normally played better than that, but the thought that I could not save part of my winnings of the first leg worried me. If I had only played a straight win on the horse that won, I could have decided what to put on the second horse. A lot of betting strategy came to my mind but a little too late.

As I lost more sets than I won, I paid for the squash and the soft drinks we had. That was the arrangement between us; the loser paid. As we were pretty equal most of the time, sometimes I paid, sometimes he. I had never lost all the sets in a row. This was just nerves. Although it was only a pound I would lose, £10 going on the second leg were high stakes to which I was not accustomed.

I looked at my watch. It was past 5 o'clock. The race was run by now. We went into the changing rooms, removed our sweaters, wiped our perspiring bodies, changed back into our grey flannels and tweed coats and back at the bus stop we queued to return home.

At Marble Arch where we got off, a newspaper boy was shouting "All race results"! The big moment had come. We quickly turned to the back page where the results of

various centres are clustered together. George saw it first. "Bad luck", he said over my shoulder, "second".

"Just look at that luck", I said.

"I know", George said, "short-head".

He was as depressed as I was. We walked to our digs without exchanging a word. It was not the pound I had lost that worried me, but the fact that I had come so near to a double and lost. Why do such things happen only to me? Or do they also happen to others and I never hear about it?

George and I sat and talked. As I had paid for the squash game, George volunteered to stand me dinner. "Not too fancy", he clarified. "But I can do a spaghetti meal in Soho. I feel I have a big, big, empty stomach to fill".

It was a Friday night, I well remember. A little after 8 o'clock we took a bus down to Piccadilly Circus, walked up Shaftesbury Avenue, then turned left, down a street till we came to the smell of seasoned cooking. That was the restaurant we were looking for.

George was generous that day in his effort to soften my blow. He ordered a bottle of Chianti which turned out to be so young, we could taste the wood of the cask in which that heady wine was brewed. But the spaghetti soaked it up. Our stomachs protruding like those of pregnant women, we ambled out in the fresh air of that summer night, back into Shaftesbury Avenue to the bus stop at Piccadilly Circus. There was the newspaper vendor at the corner with a few copies left of the late night final edition of the evening papers. I bought one to see what price my horse would have paid if it had won.

"You're not starting that all over again", George said. "I stood you dinner to help you forget the damn thing".

"I only want to see what it would have paid".

"You're bloody silly. What's the use?"

But I looked just the same. The horse had won — on an objection. It paid 8 to 1. "George?" I yelled, "I won".

"Don't shout", he said, feeling embarrassed because I was so excited. He snatched the paper out of my hands. What

I said was true. Our bus came by but we let it go. We started multiplying the odds. 8 to 1, that became £80, plus £9 from before and that made it a total win of £89.

"I say, are you sure of your bookie?"

"I hope so", I replied, petrified at the swing of the pendulum in my favour.

"When do you get the dough?"

"Tomorrow, I guess". My bookmaker's cheques always came on Saturdays by the last post on the rare occasions on which I had won. £89 was a lot of money. Three months' allowance! I could not believe my luck. Our mood became sombre and subdued instead of being boisterous or chirpy. George came to my room and we talked late into the night. He was a Greek brought up in Egypt. He spoke about the Pharaohs and I told him about our Moghuls. Next evening, as the last post was dropped in the box, I was there to catch it. The bookie's cheque arrived — "Pounds eighty-nine only", it said in a magnificent scrawl. I felt like a Pharaoh and a Moghul rolled up in one.

On Monday morning as the door of my bank opened I was there. I filled in the paying-in slip, banked the bookmaker's cheque and the twenty pounds of postal orders from India which were intact. The monthly remittance from home had also just arrived and I found that fifteen more pounds had been sent to me than usual. Everyone seemed kind to me all at once.

More was yet to come. The *Daily Herald* which had a circulation of four million, the largest in England at that time, asked me to write an article on the colour bar for its features page. This was a special thrill. I sat down and wrote it. When they received it, they told me it was very well done. "We will be using it right away", the features editor said.

"When will it appear?" I anxiously inquired.

"We will use it the day after tomorrow".

I decided to keep this good news to myself till the evening before the article was to appear. I had a nap

that afternoon for I planned to stay up the night. I avoided meeting anybody for I wanted to be by myself. Four million people who read this leading newspaper of socialist Britain would hear of me tomorrow. I found out that first copies of the morning papers were available by 2 a.m. and I ambled along the Strand, through Covent Garden to the old offices of Odhams Press where the *Daily Herald* was printed, to get myself an early copy. Under a street lamp I opened the paper to the centre page. In huge letters spread over many columns was the title, COLOUR BAR and below it in large type was my name. What hit me, however, was a huge two column picture, a cut-out of my face. Wherever did they get this picture, I wondered. Not one of the *Daily Herald's* four million readers could miss this article. I slid away lest I be recognised by the workmen loading the newspaper delivery vans. I hailed a passing cab and drove straight home so that I could read the article all by myself.

When I got home I realised the picture was not of myself. It was of Paul Robeson who, the *Herald* said, had also experienced the colour bar. That was a relief, but they had put my name in such large letters so close to his picture that even I had made the mistake. I must have read my article half a dozen times. There was nothing else to do at that hour of the night and I was too excited to sleep. Then an idea crossed my mind. I decided to stay up till the early hours of the morning, go out by the underground and watch the reaction of people reading it. They would not know who I was and I would find out how the working class of Britain, the men and women who got up early for work, reacted to my article on this deeply moving subject. The working class was the backbone of Britain. Their opinion would count.

I waited up till four o'clock in the morning, then went to a restaurant in Piccadilly which was open all night. I needed a cup of coffee. At quite a few tables, breakfast was being served. There were night-club girls who had finished work, still wearing heavy make-up. They read

no newspapers at all. I was the only one with a paper in my hand.

The girls at the table next to me were a chirpy lot, giggling away as one of them narrated what had happened to her the night before. Her tale ran into a long narrative of "then he said and I said and he said", until the end, when another girl came to the point and asked, "But what did he pay?"

"Only five pиаunds. That's why I wuddunt go for the night", she said, establishing her integrity.

I was tempted to chip into that conversation and, in my best cockney accent, tell the bubbling little popsie, "Gawd, you must be expensive". But with the *Daily Herald* still in my hand, I could not very well afford to go from the sublime to a fatuous conversation with this pretty little brainless kid. I paid my bill and went down into the tube station, bought myself a ticket to as far as the underground would go in the direction of the City. There is always lots of room in the tubes at this early hour of the morning. The early morning commuters were mostly men and quite a few were yawning. Only one of them had a copy of the *Daily Herald* in his hand and he was not reading it.

I got down at the Bank, crossed over to the platform opposite to take the tube coming back. I got on to the Lancaster Gate, Notting Hill Gate line. I changed over to yet another line later that morning, tried Kensington and Hyde Park Corner back towards the city, but in two whole hours of travel by underground, I found only one young man reading the *Daily Herald* and he was still glued to the sports page when he got down.

It was frustrating, but I persevered. Perhaps it was too early. I went on, well past 9 o'clock that morning, still travelling on the same ticket purchased at Piccadilly, changing from one line to the other in search of the man who would read my article. At last I found him. He looked a serious type; he wore a stiff white collar, a well-worn grey suit and a bowler hat. He carried an umbrella. He came in at South Kensington and was finishing the continuation of an article which began on the front page. Then he

turned to the centre page. He saw my article, paused for only a moment at the headline, looked at Paul Robeson's picture, but turned away from the page. When his station arrived, he got off. I got down at the next station and went home by bus. In the weeks that followed I did not meet a man or woman who had read my article. It is bad enough for a writer to get his article back with a reject slip; it is worse when the article is accepted, sees print, is paid for but no one reads it. But that is the luck of the game.

After Oxford but before I appeared for the Indian Civil Service and my Bar final examinations, my parents suggested I should come back home on a short holiday to discuss my future plans. In my letters home I had been pleading with my father to release me from my promise to appear for the I.C.S. If I passed it, I would have been a mere cog in the great wheel of British bureaucracy in India. To discuss such matters I paid a quick visit to India. My father was by now transferred to another port, Madras. The time schedule of this brief holiday got disrupted by a diphtheria germ. Along with an army captain and an air force lieutenant who were regular visitors to my parents' house, I went to a rugger ball at the local gymkhana club. We drank champagne out of the large silver cup which the Kolar Gold Field team had won. All three of us caught diphtheria. Someone ahead of us was a carrier.

The army captain was a tall, handsome fellow. He was in charge of the gunnery school at Fort St. George. Both he and the air force one-striper would roll up at my house for dinner most days of the week, by invitation. Wherever my parents lived, Karachi, Madras or Bombay, they kept open house. Our home attracted young people to it.

The army captain showed his appreciation of the hospitality he received by ordering a gun salute whenever any one of

us went out of station. My father rated a 21-gun salute, there were 19 for my mother, 17 for my sister and 11 for my brother and myself. The captain would inform his company when he wanted the firing practice to begin. He would make it coincide with the departure of our train from Madras railway station. If more than one person was leaving, the higher gun salute prevailed.

The Air Force lad showed how fond he was of our family some years later at Karachi. He was posted at the air-base at Drigh Road and hearing that my parents were on a visit to his city, he hurriedly obtained half a dozen bottles of champagne from his mess, hired a taxi on credit and drove all the way into Karachi to present himself, his compliments and his champagne.

The captain rose high. He became a full general, and Chief of Army Staff. His name was Thimmayya. "Timmy" as we called him was a Coorg from the south. He died of a heart attack in Nicosia, while commanding the U.N. forces in Cyprus. But as he rose in rank, we tended to drift apart. I could not sit in the Moghul court of fawning courtiers and soldiers around the Establishment. It was in the interest of those who were anxious to get on in their respective careers to keep at a slight distance from me and wherever I sensed that I was causing the least discomfort to my friends, I was the first to move away.

I stayed at Timmy's house in New Delhi briefly on two occasions — once when he was all by himself. We had arrived together by plane late at night and as only one room was ready we slept in it. The next morning at breakfast he was in a mood to talk. The political situation in the country was most unsatisfactory. The Congress party in power was vacillating. Only Nehru was clear about oneness of nationality, resisting the pull of clashing community interests. "Was there any thinking done by you chaps about what you would do if the law and order situation got worse?", I asked Lt. General Thimmayya, then very close to the top of his career. It was a loaded question. He could answer it any way he liked, aware that a news-

paperman was asking this question of a soldier.

Timmy turned around sharply. Perhaps he felt I knew a little more than I should. Or he felt, I may have read his mind. He thought for a while, then without any inflection in his voice, he replied, "I had made up my mind. If the situation had not come to hand by that Saturday morning. . . ." Lt. General Thimmayya outlined for me in detail how he had planned to set the matter right. In short, I felt he had cast Nehru to play the role Neguib or Nasser played in Egypt. Whether that was a real threat to democracy or just hot wind blowing in Delhi, we will never know.

"Nehru?" I asked.

"He's all right". Timmy tugged at his cigarette. Then added, "We are there to look after him".

Nehru had an amazing glamour for many people in different walks of life. Years after Nehru's death an enlightened Muslim in a very high official position said, "Nehru had human failings, but he had that great quality of humaneness about him. He was a great man". This was the generally held view of Nehru; it was unfortunate that I saw too many of his failings and too little of his greatness.

Nehru evoked perhaps the greatest emotion India has known, even more than Mahatma Gandhi did. But Gandhiji had saintliness about him, a drop of the divine spirit in his physical self. He was the Maharishi who could sublimate the body to the spirit. He was a purified soul who in his lifetime had attained oneness with his Maker. Humility exuded from him, more and more as he was about to move away from the earth. Gandhiji was messianic. Those who noticed the pigmentation of his skin realised it was different from the skin of an ordinary man.

The last time I saw Timmy was at the restaurant of a Bombay hotel. The band was playing *The Last Train to San Fernando*. The great soldier was at a table surrounded by those who would jump on to anyone's bandwagon. There are always plenty of this type in India. We said an effusive 'hello' to each other but it was only out of politeness. The

next thing I heard was that Timmy had died of a heart attack.

The air force lieutenant rose only to the rank of a wing commander during the war. His life was short. His name was Henry Ranganathan. A very able war pilot, he met with death while taxi-ing his plane at an airport.

But there was a story about his father which, if indicative of a family strain, compels a great deal of admiration. Henry's father was Sir Samuel Ranganathan, who headed India House in London during the war. As India was not yet a sovereign state, we had no ambassador in Washington. We were represented by the British Embassy. The Press Club of America however wanted an Indian viewpoint on the war and had invited Sir Samuel to address it.

An hour before he was due to leave his hotel for the function a flash message was received by the British Embassy to say that Henry was killed. The British ambassador sent an official to convey the sad news to Sir Samuel. This British official was also to conduct him to the Press Club. Because of the news the official arrived earlier. Lady Ranganathan was not yet ready, but Sir Samuel came down.

"I have some bad news for you, sir", the official said. He produced the cable from his pocket. Sir Samuel read it. He said only two words, "My Henry". Then he put the cable into his pocket. There was a silence which the Englishman broke by saying, as he was instructed to do, that if Sir Samuel would like to cancel his engagement at the Press Club, everyone would understand.

"No", said Sir Samuel. "This is a duty I have to perform. But don't mention anything to my wife. I will break the news to her later".

Soon Lady Ranganathan came down, happily apologising for having kept everyone waiting. "Let's go", Sir Samuel said and in the British embassy car they drove to the Press Club for the lunch and the speech. In the car, Sir Samuel made very normal conversation. At the meeting, he was received, introduced, made to sit in his place as guest of honour, lunch was served with which he toyed. He did not like to reveal to anyone that anything had gone wrong. The

only man who knew was the British official who had brought the sad news.

When lunch was over, Sir Samuel was introduced and called upon to speak. It was an important speech for its purpose was to explain India's viewpoint on the war to America. Page by page he went through that speech, not leaving out so much as a comma. He sat down, received the warm applause, listened to the vote of thanks, collected his wife and returned to his room at the hotel. Then he told her about the cable in his pocket. They sat down and wept for the loss of their son.

I felt very proud hearing this story from the British official himself. I could understand it. Sir Samuel was from south India. In most countries, it is the north which has the strength; in India the home of the native of the soil, the early Dravidian, is in the south. The conquerors who came through the Khyber Pass settled invariably in the north and the original inhabitant of India got pushed down, taking with him the strength which was his heritage.

Timmy, Henry and I were the three at the rugger dance who picked up the diphtheria germ. My bug played the most havoc. Many years later I met a pilot at a cocktail party in Bombay and I happened to remark that a pilot's life must be an interesting one. He agreed, saying, "I never know what my next errand will be. I remember I was once asked to go south to Madras where a young man was dying. I waited three whole days for him at the airport but he didn't die.

"Who was he?" I asked out of curiosity.

"All I remember is that he was the son of a Collector of Customs".

"That was me". My illness was serious I knew, but no one had told me that a plane was standing by!

The pilot felt most embarrassed at seeing 'the body' standing beside him, asking him questions. Nervously he spilt some of his drink, then added, "I am so glad you are still alive".

I recollect that illness. The leading ear nose and

throat specialist in Madras, Dr. Cherian, was out of station. We had to call someone else. An elderly Indian doctor who could not have had a very affluent practice, arrived. He had one look at my throat and, saying it would 'hurt a little' he pierced my septic tonsil with a sharp pointed instrument. He used no novocaine or pain deadener of any sort. It was the sort of operation Robinson Crusoe might have performed on Man Friday. I bled like a slaughtered lamb at a sacrificial altar. It was however this clumsy operation on my raw throat by the old doctor with a shaky hand which saved my life. He not only bled me white; he bled the streptococci out of me at the same time. It could be that Mars in the Tenth House made me fight for life as it has made me fight all through it.

The illness set back the date of my return. In the discussions at home about my future, father was inclined to offer less resistance than before. My mother frequently pleaded with him, "Why not let him do what he wants to? He doesn't want government service".

"But, Homi", father said — that was how he called her though her correct name was Homai—"I want him to have security. That's most important in life, security that every month he will receive enough salary to live on".

At that point, I realised we were on different wave-lengths. It was a difference, fundamental to two ways of living and to two ways of thinking. At times like these, I found more affinity with Abraham Lincoln's famous words, "As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master". I knew I did not want to be flung on the scrapheap of the have-nots of life; but I felt I would be bored sitting on the secure hilltop of the haves. With youth on my side — I was twenty-five then — I could take a gamble with my life.

I realise now I must have been a difficult young man to understand. I had a dislike for mediocrity in man. When mediocrity pontificated to me, I would not oppose it. When I saw mediocrity succeed and hold a position in which it could control the destiny of others, these were my greatest moments of frustration.

In Madras in 1936, with a lot of give and take and my mother intervening on my behalf, a decision was reached: I would sit for the I.C.S., examination but I was not to be blamed if I did not pass it. But I had to appear for my Bar Finals and pass that exam. "This is the least I can expect of you. It will be difficult to make a quick living at the Bar, but you should have no difficulty". That was the conclusion reached after numerous family conferences, a compromise fair to all.

I left Madras with the future commander-in-chief of India firing an 11-gun salute for me.

7

Paris, the unlisted university

I FELT I was a different person now. One part of my life was over, another was about to begin. I had fought for my right to decide for myself. My parents had gracefully yielded to me. I had carefully to weigh my father's words about the value of security. Because of the freedom he had given me, I felt more responsible about my future than before. In the boat-train, from Marseilles to London as I looked blankly at the misty glass windowpane through which I could see nothing, I carefully thought it out. Some clue would come my way to make up my mind whether to go for security or to take my chance. Meanwhile I decided to break my journey in Paris for the week-end.

These boat-train journeys were on the Wagon Lits and the food, then so cheap, was really exquisite with a choice of red or white wine. In my compartment there was an Indian student on his first trip out of India. I realised he was raw. He had a bright yellow tin trunk on which his name was painted and below it were his degrees 'B.A., LL.B.' When the conductor came along to take the order for lunch, calling out "*déjeuner, déjeuner*", he did not understand. I suggested he should order his lunch.

"No, please", he said in heavily accented Indian tones, "I am vegetarian". I offered to convey his requirements to the conductor, adding, "He can make something special for you. It will be late by the time we get to Paris".

"No, please", he said again, as if I was trying to convert

him to indulge in some anti-religious activity, "I am strict vegetarian. When I am reaching Paris I will go to the *bazaar* and buy some fruit".

I gave up. In good faith I had tried to help a fellow Indian. But Indians often suspect their own kind when abroad. It is best to leave them alone. A *bazaar* in Paris! And open for him at 11 o'clock! Okay chum, you learn the hard way, I thought to myself.

He did not remain a vegetarian very long for at Lyons station where the train stopped around tea-time, I awoke from a nap to find he had got down onto the platform. When he came back to the compartment he had an enormous sandwich in his hand, a long French roll sliced in half, buttered and crammed with slices of ham. He had eaten half his sandwich already. "What are you eating?" I asked him.

"Some red vegetable", came the reply.

I concurred with a nod of the head. If I had enlightened him on the contents of his sandwich, he might have regarded it incumbent on himself to have a dip in the Seine, the holy river of the French, just as bathing in the Ganges is regarded as necessary for absolution from sin committed on Indian soil.

Education in England is acquired fast by our Indian students even from the most orthodox families. When I bumped into the same young man a year later, he was stepping out of Regent Palace hotel with a peroxide blonde hanging on to his arm. Proudly he introduced her to me. I doffed my hat and she held out her hand, saying "Pleased tameetcher, I'm sure".

I used to stay in Paris at that time in a block of service apartments on the rue du Faubourg St. Honoré, not far from the British Embassy. It was an exquisite little place, moderately priced, with good size bed-sitting rooms, each

with a minute entrance hall, a bath, and a bidet, and front-door key. There was freedom to do as you liked, so long as you said *bonjour* during the day and *bon soir* in the evening to the concierge. Politeness mattered in Paris. What you did with your time in your apartment was your own affair. As it was said in the introduction to *Ninotchka*, that exquisite film, this was the Paris in which "when a Frenchman put out the light it was not because of an air-raid warning".

It was on this trip that I conceived the idea of how one should pay one's respect to the great city. As I drove in a taxi from the railway station to my apartment, I did not look out of the cab window. When I arrived at my apartment house, I checked in and went straight up. After a shave and a bath, I put on a well-pressed suit, went down into the street again where I took a cab and asked to be driven to the Place de la Concorde. Again I did not look out of the cab window. I kept my eyes down. In the middle of the Place, near the stone column known as Cleopatra's Needle, I got out. Most Paris taxi-drivers would understand such behaviour as being that of a sight-seeing tourist, but my driver did question my desire to be driven to the middle of an empty space. When, in clear French, I repeated, "*Place de la Concorde, au milieu*", emphasising the words "in the middle", I could hear him mumble, "*mais il est fou*" which colloquially translated meant, "But he must be nuts". The French generally so tolerant of other people's eccentricities, sometimes become extremely insular in their outlook once they come to the conclusion that their answer should be "*non*". Then they just refuse to change their minds and adopt an attitude of inflexibility, and become *petit bourgeois*, equivalent to what the Americans call 'small town'. It indicates the limitation to which their understanding will stretch. If you bend down to explain, you come to their level and get brushed aside; if on the other hand you adopt an attitude of aloofness, they credit you with belonging to *le grand monde*, the big world to which they cannot belong.

But my cab driver that evening was meek and mild. He

pulled up when I tapped on the sliding glass window which partitioned us but he was worried at my peculiar request and my behaviour. I got down, still keeping my eyes down, turned towards the broad vista of the Champs Elysees and then lifted my eyes. There, in the distance was the floodlit *Arc de Triomphe* at the end of the Avenue, an eyeful of the beauty that is Paris.

This ritual I have adopted on many a subsequent visit to that city, based on the theory that everything that is beautiful can be seen in its correct perspective over and over again. Only a minute or two is needed for the performance of this ritual. Then, on to wherever I wanted to go.

While most men who have been to Paris speak in "oohs" and "ahs" about their visit to this city, as if with every bed and breakfast a woman is thrown in, this is more a crude boast than fact. Admittedly to the average Indian who has not seen a naked woman except when peeping through the keyhole, it does come as a bit of a shock when from his comfortable seat in the *Folies-Bergère*, he can see with a naked eye rows and rows of naked women walking leisurely on the stage as if they are going in or coming out of a shower bath. But in over fifty visits to Paris I paid only one visit to the *Folies*. Womanhood at a distance has little attraction for me. She has got to be owned, she has got to be held in order to have some meaning.

On that solitary visit to the *Folies*, all I could afford was a ticket to the *promenoir*, the circular standing room around the expensive stalls. Here the girls on stage, from the *corps de ballet* and the chorus would come, dressed of course, to make their bookings for the night. They floated around, waiting for the men to view them closer. A conversation would start, followed by a slip-away to the bar for a drink where terms would be discussed between the man and the girl who was willing to be his partner for the night. The price of passion is usually negotiated per kilo of amour.

There were quite a few girls promenading around that evening. Like models at a fashion show they had a studied waik, a brisk pace, a swirl, showing their bodies to

advantage, front view, back view, the profile of the uplifted bosom, a tilt of the chin. It gave the prospective customer time to visualise what could be done with her in various poses, listed or unlisted in the *Kamasutra*.

One Junoesque red-head appeared to circle around me more than once. To ease her mind, I informed her in an undertone, "*pas ce soir!*", not this evening. She smiled back, aware that at least I spoke the language of the *Folies Bergere*. But a slightly older man bewildered at what was going on around him, seemed still undecided what he should do. When she did her little trot and swirl near him, his eyes lit up; they ran up and down her firmly-built torso. He looked at her as a connoisseur of meat gauges the proportion of the lean to the fat on a leg of ham. She noticed he was interested but he had not indicated what was in his mind. She felt she should bring him quicker to a decision. She stopped in front of him, her hands resting on her hips in the Billingsgate pose. "*Bon soir*", she said as an introductory greeting.

He reciprocated her 'good evening' with a broad grin. Speech did not flow from him however, leaving her to guess what his intentions were. So she came to the point. "*Voulez-vous une femme ce soir?*" she asked. She was asking if he wanted a woman for the evening. He had never had such a question put to him so directly. He gasped, his lower lip dropping because of the shock. "*Pourquoi?*" was the only word he could utter. Did he need more elaboration on the question she had put to him, or was it just a twitch of the vocal nerve?

As all this happened so close to me, I almost felt like helping the poor chap out. Literally translated the French word he had spoken meant, "For what?". But she cut the conversation short by patting him gently on the cheek and saying, "I theenk you go back home. Mamma is calling you". Then turning to me, she added, "He wouldn't know where the 'ell to find it if I took him 'ome". All in English too. With this she turned briskly around and walked away to a group of men further on. "The bloody bitch", the

jilted man said audibly when she had gone. I shrugged my shoulders, declining to be drawn into that problem.

The main attraction of Paris, however, was not the naked women on the stage of the Folies Bergere or those who nightly performed in cabaret at the numerous strip-tease joints that sprang up in Paris during the years to titillate the average male tourist. The attraction this city had for me was somewhat different. While woman admittedly was the eventual goal, the manoeuvre was often more attractive than the conquest. On the way came such pleasures as the absorption of music, not ethereal classical music which produces pure thought, but the music of a new school of earthy composers who concentrated on the beat and the rhythm, which when absorbed produced the impure urge.

In the early 1930's Paris was dancing to the rhumba. Its most polished exponent was the orchestra leader, Don Azpiazu. He played *The Peanut Vendor* with maracas, gourds and two wooden sticks clanking out a haunting beat which lasted through the night. *The Peanut Vendor* marked an epoch just as much as *Lili Marlene* at a later war period. Most of these tunes reached the barrel organ, but a few remained in the albums of memory associated with the women with whom they were danced. It has been like this for generations.

Paris of the 1930's was so varied in its attraction that no two men reacted to it the same way. At the end of many an avenue or petite rue, there would be a woman waiting, physically if a man were lucky, but mentally in any case. Yet, contrary to common belief, a French woman is most difficult 'to make'. Other seemingly more prudish and orthodox communities of the world have produced better final results, but what was always so different about a girl in Paris, whether French, American or English, was that it was no offence openly to flirt with her. Paris was congenial to flirtation.

I remember going into an elegant night club in Montmartre with a friend whose first name was Stewart. His close friends called him "Stew". It was Christmas Eve and we

were dressed in our satin-faced dinner jackets. As the door opened for us, three people came out, a gorgeous blonde in her late twenties escorted by two well-dressed young men, one of whom could have been her husband. As the space in the entrance hall was narrow, my friend and I stood back, allowing the three to pass, before we entered. She was expensively dressed, a mink thrown over her shoulders. "That is beautiful", I said to Stew, quite quietly. But she heard my remark. She stopped in front of me and turned to look up at me.

"Merry Christmas", I said to her.

She raised her lips to me. So I kissed her, a soft, lingering kiss. She did not pull away. When the kiss was over, she said in a lush voice, "Merry Christmas to you too, handsome". The two men trailing behind her merely nodded as they passed me. That was Paris. It was a city in which one could meet 'a stranger in paradise', to borrow the words of the song.

It was on another visit to this once lovely capital of France, on a New Year's Eve, that we decided to go to the most expensive night club in town, the *Monseigneur*. Stewart felt it necessary to make a reservation but when he rang to make the booking he was told, quite abruptly, that all tables had been booked weeks ahead. The information was further volunteered that the Crown Prince of a certain Scandinavian country was bringing a big party, so was a leading Paris couturier. It was a night packed with celebrities and uncrowned heads of some of the best monarchies in Europe. As Stewart put down the telephone, he remarked, "What the hell! There are a hundred other night clubs we can go to". But the *Monseigneur* was, at the time, the night club of Paris with that exquisite mulatto girl, Nina Mae McKinney, singing with the band. It was that great Negro¹ entertainer, Frisco, who had made it famous. When Frisco died he was important enough to be mentioned in the "People" column of *Time* magazine.

¹ I am given to understand that today in the U.S. a Negro is more politely referred to as a 'black'!

It was a cold December evening in Paris and we had been hopping from night club to night club, without staying long at any one place. Being New Year's Eve, the '*boîtes*' were stuffy and full. Every now and then we would come out into the street for a breath of fresh air. As we were ambling down the rue Montmartre, we saw a huge black Delage, a most expensive French car. Sitting at its wheel, in a smart uniform, was a Negro chauffeur. The car was stupendous, the last word in luxury. As the street lamp fell on the upholstery inside, we noticed it was beige in colour. The car was brand new.

"Boy, what a car!", Stew said, "I wouldn't mind owning one of these. That's what we need to get into the *Monseigneur* tonight". The idea was his, so was its execution. Soon he started negotiations with the Negro to run us up to the night club which was not far off. If we got in, fine; if not, he must bring us back to where we started. For this run, the driver was offered a hundred francs, worth at the time a little more than a pound sterling.

"Fair enough", said the chauffeur. "It's Noo Year's Eve and I gotta keep de engine warm anyway. Say bowse, get in. I drive you down".

We got in. We were two young men in well-tailored evening clothes. We looked the type that could have owned such a car. Within a few minutes we were at the doorstep of the *Monseigneur* with the doorman saluting us as the Delage pulled up outside his famed night club. Accustomed to opening a variety of car doors, these doormen knew from the look of a car when a celebrity would step out of one of them. As our car door opened, Stew jumped out, saying, "Stay in. I'll see if we can get in". I did as I was told, for I knew his French was better than mine. The Negro chauffeur also played his part by jumping out of his driver's seat to hold open the door for us. To make the moment more realistic he stood with his cap reverently held to his chest.

While the doorman and we were at street level, the entrance to the night club was a few steps up. Stew told

the doorman to ask the *maitre d'hotel* to come down quickly. At this, the doorman in his long coated uniform ran up the stairs and soon the *maitre d'hotel* was down, bowing profusely to Stewart and welcoming him in. "No, no", Stewart said. "*Monsieur le prince* is very particular where I take him. I must know if this night club is good". Then, more confidentially, "I would not like to lose my job". *Monsieur le prince* was me, sitting calmly inside the car. I don't know when he decided on this crazy idea.

The *maitre d'hotel* was shocked. With his arms cutting wild semaphores in the air, he replied with considerable emphasis: "Monsieur this is the best night club in Paris".

To give my friend's good opening gambit some support, I started uttering a few words in Hindustani inside the car. What I said had no meaning at all, but their sound conveyed my impatience at being made to wait. At this point Stewart emphasised that the table given to us should be good.

I stepped out, made some gestures intended to indicate to Stewart who was playing the role of an A.D.C., that our driver must not be asked to wait. It was New Year's Eve and despite my high status, I would go home in some hired conveyance such as a taxi-cab. "You go home", I commanded the driver. The Negro chauffeur in turn played his part extremely well, protesting to my A.D.C. that he could not possibly allow "*Monsieur le prince*" to ride in a plebian conveyance. But when the promised 100-franc note was pressed into his hand, the faked protest died down. Like the great princes of India I carried no filthy lucre on me. All payments were made by my A.D.C. Later, of course, Stewart and I scrupulously totted up the cost of the expensive idea and shared it equally!

We moved in a convoy towards the main room, the *maitre d'hotel* bowing profusely as he led the way. I uttered a few pointless Indian phrases such as "*kon hai?*" and "*eh kiya hai?*", which mean "who's there?" and "what's this?". No one could answer me because no one understood what I was saying. As we entered the luxurious night club, the doorman now at attention, said in an audible whisper to

one of the waiters, "*très haute, très riche, mais très démocratique*". These words meant, "very high, very rich, but very democratic". The democratic touch was discernible to him from my edict to the Negro chauffeur, "You go home".

There was a stir in the room as we walked in. A small table for two was hurriedly set up in a corner of the dance floor. It was soon covered with a damask table cloth, champagne glasses and gold-rimmed plates with the monogram of the night club on them. Through closely packed tables, flanked with international society, we squeezed our way to the dance floor, ranking higher it would appear than a crown prince and a leading couturier. An Indian, and more so a prince, commanded a great deal of respectful attention in Europe in those days. He was known as a giver; not a receiver of Aid.

At this stage, Stewart got another crazy idea. He told the waiter who took our order, "For Monsieur le prince; please bring a glass of hot milk; for me a bottle of good champagne will do. See that it is very dry".

"Hot milk?" A night club waiter does not usually execute such an order. He had to make sure he had heard it right. "Yes", said Stew, "religious reasons. He doesn't drink alcohol. He even regards coffee and tea as poisonous". The waiter understood. I dared not speak, in front of the waiter but later, I called Stew a few words not fit to print. I covered up my annoyance with a forced smile on my face.

"It has to be foolproof. You've got to be a genuine high-caste rajah, *très haute, très riche*, and ever so *démocratique*", was Stew's casual reply.

There was consternation in the room ten minutes later when on a large silver salver my glass of hot milk arrived. The waiter placed it in front of me as if he were performing a ritual. Thereafter, as he opened the bottle of champagne for my A.D.C., he announced the family of grapes from which it came and its vintage, details which were hidden from view because of the white napkin which covered all but the neck of the bottle. "*Moët et Chandon*", he narrated

with poetic diction, "*mille neuf cent...*", whatever the year of vintage was. From the way Stew softly smacked his lips as the first few drops were poured into his lovely glass for him to taste, it must have been quite good.

That was Paris, a city since ruined by those who underestimate the contribution which the carefree young men made to build its reputation and establish its economy, ruined too by those who persist in the belief that unequal men should be equal.

In the course of conversation during that vacation in India, my father gathered that I had spent too much of my time in Paris in the music halls and the match-boxes of entertainment and too little imbibing art and culture. He was shocked to hear that I had not yet visited the Louvre. In defence of myself I had said that there was no hurry for the Louvre would still be there for quite some time to come, but this defence did not carry any conviction. The blunt fact was that when in Paris I went to bed too late at night and by the time I got up the next day, the Louvre would be closed.

On the Saturday of that week-end in Paris, I lunched at a Russian restaurant, Chez Korniloff in rue d'Armeil, before making my first trip to the Louvre. Korniloff was a chef from the days of the Czar. Good food is a prerequisite of the appreciation of good art. Patrons of art are never scrawny even though artists may look lean beside their canvasses. Then, on to the Louvre to roam through its long corridors.

Four important works of art stand out in that former palace of Louis Quatorze. They have reacted on me differently on different visits and therefore I cannot correctly grade them in order of beauty or importance. These four are the statue of Venus de Milo its sculptor unknown, Leonardo da Vinci's painting of the Mona Lisa, El Greco's

elongated Christ and the statue commemorating "Le victoire de Samothrace" which is also referred to as 'Winged Victory'.

I had paid so little attention to the assimilation of culture that, as I recorded in *I Go West*, I kept asking the attendants in room after room where the statue of Helen of Troy was. One attendant at the Louvre who had spent a lifetime keeping guard over these treasures, put up his hands in horror and with lashings of "*mais monsieur*"¹ exclaimed, "You are looking for the wrong woman". Perhaps because of his expressed horror, I understood the Venus better when I finally located her.

"I came nearer. Step by step I drew closer to the cold stone until I saw the curve of her breasts and the navel chiselled out of stone, the dents and the flaws. I walked round her. The neck was slightly thick and there was a curve in her back — a suggestion of a stoop. There was nothing delicate about this woman. She could not possibly look elegant in silk satins and dim lights would not suit her complexion... There were hundreds of other women who attracted me more than she did... Back down the passage, I walked till I came to the bottom of that same long flight of steps. I stopped and turned and all down my warm body a cold shudder ran. Something electric passed through me and I closed my eyes. The image I saw was one of lines and curves of a beautiful feminine figure, which I could hardly believe was the same woman. Perhaps all women were like that — to be admired only from a distance. For in its true perspective the coarseness of the Venus had faded, her body seemed frail and delicate and even seemed to breathe like a living being. But she was full of more than life. She had a spark of divinity which made her immortal, for she was a goddess. So the legends said and they were true. I left her and dashed away to Weber's where Pierre was waiting for me".²

I was then twenty-five years of age. I realise now how

¹ But sir.

² *I Go West* 10th Edition, pg. 85.

kind Harold Nicholson was when, reviewing *I Go West* in the *Daily Telegraph*, he said, "This book must be read with sympathy and respect". Nicholson was no ordinary literary critic; he could make or break an author. Immaturity is a luxury one cannot afford to indulge in forever, nor can a promising young man remain in that vacuum for too long with his promise still to be fulfilled.

On the evenings of that week-end in Paris, I did the usual round of my favourite bars; then after midnight to *Melody's Bar*, the night club in Montmartre where the music was erotic, the service friendly and smooth and a bar full of girls from whom to choose. These were the girls who waited for a rendezvous, living from night to night till their youth ran out. In Paris, they were called *poules*. Inasmuch as a man cannot dance alone, a woman became an essential companion for the absorption of that maddening rhythm which was the main attraction of *Melody's Bar*. "Get hot, maan, get hot", the Negro trumpeter would say in between blowing a high note on his trumpet, "bo', get hot". If at the end of a forty-five minute spell, a man's blood pressure still remained the same, it was time to check on his hormones.

Melody's was not a night club where one spent a whole evening. An hour was enough. The later you went, the more maddening was the music. Negro bands which played straight rhythm took time to warm up, but once the place became full, they hit the roof with the mad music they beat out. It was difficult for anyone other than a paralytic to keep still. It was far easier to nab the nearest unattached girl, jam her close to your body and dance it out. Then you could come back to the bar, offer her a drink and if she behaved nicely, you could press a *cadeau* into her hand. She collected these French currency notes in her handbag which invariably started the evening by being empty.

At the cash desk, *la caisse* as the French say, next to the bar sat *madame la patronne*, a large-size, ample bosomed woman who wore expensive looking jewellery on her well manicured hands. Whether some of the gems she flaunted

were really valuable or just paste, I never found out. But every bit of her looked affluent right up to her well coiffeured hair, worn in a bun at the top, with a diamond clip holding her tinted titian mop in place. I had an arrangement with her: on nights when I ordered two bottles of champagne, the third would be on the house. It was an uneconomic deal but on rare nights on which I wanted to show off, it came in handy. It felt good in the phoney surroundings to have a third bottle of champagne opened without having to ask for it. It marked you as a privileged guest, a V.I.P., even though in the eyes of the *patronne*, you could have rated no higher than the rest of the suckers.

So I came to the Sunday, spent lazily with a friend whose first name was Pierre, called on some of his friends in the evening, dined together, then we went to our respective homes in separate cabs, to snatch a little sleep before we caught the plane to London the next day. Pierre's respectable family home and my gaudily wall-papered *garconniere* lay in different directions. To narrate what happened to me, returning home that night, I will re-write passages from *I Go West*, shorn of their baby lamb wool.

The driver of my cab had a queer face, chiselled with age, underlined with content. He brought me back to the rue du Faubourg St. Honore. "*Mais, voila*", he said, pulling up smoothly in front of my apartment house. At I got down and dug into my pockets to pay the fare, I realised I had skipped Montmartre and Melody's Bar that night. The evening seemed incomplete without them. Moreover, I was returning to grim tutorials for the I.C.S. and hard work for the Bar finals. To see if I could be pushed to have just one last look at my favourite haunts, I asked a question of the taxi-driver, the answer to which I already knew. "How far is it from here to Montmartre?" I said. I even knew the exact cab fare. He answered my question in a way I had least expected. "*Rien n'est loin, monsieur, si le coeur desire*". Nothing is far if the heart desires it, he philosophically said. That did it. "To Montmartre", I said, getting back into the cab.

As he drove on, I sat back in the taxi with the abandon of a man allowing himself to be carried to his destiny. He was only a French cab driver, but he had voiced in a minute capsule more philosophy than Kant and Hegel, more than India's Sankaracharya did on his brief halt on earth, leaving behind a wealth of thought, rich in its philosophic content, steeped in faith, defying logic.

In that ramshackle cab, driven slowly down the empty streets of Paris late at night, one began to feel the richness of possessing a soul, even though my destination was only a sordid night club with jazz music bellowing into the ears, cheap champagne poured into cheap glasses to be drunk with great *éclat* in the company of women you had never met before and would never see again. But dirt never touched me or if it did, it did not stay on me for long. Man's ego can quickly turn the most ordinary surroundings into places of glamour and beauty only because reality would be miserable and frustrating.—Who would want that?

I got down at the top of the Place Pigalle, paid a big fare and tipped the driver handsomely. With a single sentence, he had made that week-end for me. He talked the language I wanted to hear, the language which those playing for safety could never understand. "Nothing is far, *mon sieur*, if the heart desires it". Omar Khayyam could not have done better if he were driving a taxi in Paris and there was nothing beside me in my loneliness. A greater loneliness is that which results from one's own aloofness. Then to be pushed like a pawn if only to be made aware you had a destiny.

Walking along the little side streets of Montmartre under a clear and starry sky I became absorbed in imaginative thoughts of the roles I believed I was destined to play. If anyone else had claimed he had a role in life to play I would have dismissed it with a derisive laugh. But when such a feeling comes to yourself, it makes you assume the role of a budding crusader, complete with breast-plate, shield, sword and buckler. You are inclined to discard security and lean on the side of romance. No one wants

sterling qualities in one's twenties.

So I jogged along, turning over in my mind the pro's and con's of security as a stable base on which to build a life. Could one anchor safely and then go out on brief adventures which smacked of danger, always sure of being able to return to base? Or did one have to live dangerously all the while? And what if such an experiment misfired and landed you in the gutters of poverty from which you could never recover enough status to return to security and sit on the gilded chairs of authority? It seemed most unfair that such dilemmas faced the young when least equipped to take a positive and irrevocable decision. A middle road has no attraction for a positive type.

But my way lay clear ahead. I had built such an aura of false glamour around Melody's Bar that I was sure wherever else I may go, eventually I would end up there. Being late at night, almost one o'clock by now, the place was thinning out. Although tables were available, I preferred to stand at the bar. In no mood to pick up conversation with the girls which would cost money, I concentrated on *madame la patronne*, an anchor for security. I ordered a *fine a l'eau*, which is brandy and water, which being the produce of the land was modestly priced. My conversation with the bejewelled madame who received money and gave out change was about "*la vie*", life in general, a subject on which every Frenchwoman, irrespective of her age or circumstance, has something to say.

The discussion on "*la vie*" got a little boring by the time I came to the end of my drink. I paid my small bill, realised how futile this forced visit to Montmartre had been, collected my hat and coat from the girl in the *vestiaire* and was about to leave the club when a plump young woman came rushing towards me. She had been sitting at a table close to the band.

With the usual prefatory, "*pardon, monsieur*", she asked if she could have a word with me. As this was the normal gambit for a blunt proposition, I politely replied, "Not this evening, *je suis fatigué*". As in Tokyo, Japan, so in Paris,

you do not say "no". It is more polite to indicate that the pleasure has, under circumstances beyond one's control, to be deferred to a future date. The Americans speak about taking rain checks.

But the fat girl told me she was not the woman concerned. There was 'a lady' who would like to meet me. "*Une dame*", she said with emphasis. She had rushed up only to convey this message to me. I looked in the direction from which the message had come. In the dim light of Melody's, I could see a pretty young woman with an expensive fur coat slipping off her shoulders. With thoughts of security uppermost in my mind and with time running out, for I was to catch a plane to London early the next morning, I thought it best to let the lovely vision remain in the distance rather than be entangled with it. I therefore produced my Imperial Airways ticket to convince the fat girl that I really was leaving the next morning. She would not take 'no' for an answer and led me by the arm to the table at which this young woman was sitting. Words were exchanged between them in Spanish. The young woman, who looked even lovelier at close sight, held out her hand to be kissed.

She was a very fair Latin, well-bred, sophisticated, soft and delicate, a trifle shy. She was surrounded by three girls from the club to whom she was standing drinks. I told her in English that I would have been delighted to join her party, but I had to go. I asked to be excused.

She spoke a little English and said, "You are not angry with me?" I assured her I was not. She then asked whether I would do her a favour and dance with her just once before I left. I immediately took off my overcoat, put down my hat and led her on to the dance floor. The Latin American band which relieved the Negro jazz band played a tango. As we danced I noticed how supple her body was. Occasionally I looked into her eyes.

She told me a little more about herself, speaking with difficulty in English. She explained that she was not one of the other girls; for the last two nights she had come to Melody's escorted by her male relatives. She

had seen me come in on both nights and leave. When she enquired from the waiter who I was, she was told that I was "*un client*" who when in Paris frequented Melody's. "Tonight I came alone". I felt flattered though I did not believe everything she said. She added: "I have never gone out alone at this hour".

This was a type of situation I had not known before and lack of experience made me unduly cautious. My ego boosted, my curiosity was aroused. Moreover, I had gathered from her conversation that she had fled from Spain, for this was at the time of the Spanish civil war. Budding journalist that I was, I felt here was a story, if not a woman, whom I should not let slip through my hands. I therefore suggested that she should join me for a bowl of onion soup at the restaurant across the street and we could talk a little more. Her face lit up at that invitation. She hurried back to her table, paid her bill, gathered her handbag and other belongings. She also brought my hat and coat which were at her table, tucked her arm in mine and very soon we were out in the *rue Fontaine*, heading for the eating house opposite, known as the *Cloche d'Or*.

As we were crossing the road, halting to allow cars to pass, she held me back by the arm and in the middle of the road, she asked, "If I promise to do your packing for you, can I stay with you till you leave?" I looked at her in the dimly lit street, her grey-blue eyes glistening, her face gleaming with a smile. My mind must have gone off the subject of security which my father had repeatedly underlined, for I said without hesitation that she could. She gripped my arm, her dark hair nestling in the warmth of my overcoat. "Do you really want onion soup?" she asked. I shook my head.

There are times when a nod or a shake of the head is only a reflex, unconnected with logic and reasoning. A look into the eyes of a woman can arrest all processes of thought. Situations occur in life which cannot be tackled with prior knowledge based only on theory. In the middle of that little rue in Montmartre, with a beautiful woman looking

soulfully into my eyes, this was one such moment, forty years ago. It was a new kind of experience, resulting in a new kind of learning acquired at an university unlisted in the academic world.

We got into a waiting taxi and drove to my apartment. Paris was a city where the greatest freedom of all was freedom to love and when you rang downstairs to the concierge the next morning to ask for coffee and *croissants* for breakfast, he would enquire out of natural politeness whether the order was for one or for two. How different this was from the reaction of a landlady in London, who in similar circumstances would lose her voice at the other end of the telephone and, if she were kind-hearted enough to feed the hungry lovers, she would bring her trayful of cornflakes, some hard boiled eggs, coffee and milk with toast, butter and marmalade, lay the tray hurriedly on a dilapidated dressing table or an antiquated, unusable chair and run out of the bedroom without so much as casting a glance at the scene of the alleged immorality.

I will not go through the short hours of that night in Paris, for man should not attempt to re-live fleeting moments such as these, however attractive may have been the feeling of conquest and overlordship at the time. Such moments come and they go. It is only when they are related to some important incident in the mainstream of an individual's life that they are recollected. In my case what I remember more vividly was that in the taxi to the air terminal the next morning, where I was to catch the airline bus to the airport, I put down the window of the cab only to see the haunting word *Sécurité* lettered in its glass. While this marking only meant that the glass, if smashed, would not splinter, to me it had greater meaning. That a casual stranger in the night, born in riches, uprooted from the prim Catholicism of old Spain now turned refugee because of the Spanish Civil War, should have been so unafraid to grab a few hours of happiness with a stranger who had caught her fancy, made me realise that there were more exciting things in life than the sure salary of the Indian Civil Service and

a forlorn hope that you may sit on a red velvet, gilded chair which lay at the end of that road to security.

8

Appeal in Latin

MY EXAMINERS for the I.C.S. certainly opened the portals of that noble service wide enough for me to enter as judged by the marks they gave me for my *viva voce*, 396 out of 400. It was, however, in such papers as elementary science that I did irretrievably badly. I found it difficult to answer such prosaic questions in my science paper as "how is ice made?" Perhaps this knowledge was essential to life in the forelorn districts of India where a young I.C.S. man normally begins his career as a district judge or a revenue officer. But it was stultifying for one who aimed at becoming a writer.

I felt aggrieved that I had blotted my copybook with a first mark of failure in an exam which I pleaded I should be allowed to skip. It lowered my morale. I followed it up with another in my Bar finals which I tried to take too much in my stride. The result seemed absurd; a high honours degree in law obtained at Oxford and a failure in a similar exam for the Bar. I was even more depressed at the thought of the disappointment I had caused to my parents, who had made enough sacrifice to make my expensive education possible. They were now getting impatient with the results. To add to their chagrin, they had received, unknown to me, a confidential report on me from a trusted friend of my father. It seems this upright Parsi gentleman had called early one morning at the service flat in London's Half Moon Street which I had taken for a fortnight and was

peremptorily told by the maid who opened the door to him: "I'm sorry, sir. Can't just go in and wake him up. I wouldn't know if he has company!" Mayfair service flats may have had their own methods of ensuring privacy but this over-caution of a well-meaning maid proved disastrous for me. Soon thereafter I received a letter from Bombay suggesting that I return home and settle down to some sort of a job in India. Expensive apartments in Mayfair and unconventional ways of modern living, the letter said, were not conducive to study.

I did not, at first, take this parental outburst seriously. But shortly thereafter I received firmer instructions to return home at once, followed by the abrupt announcement that the allowance they had just sent me would be the last! In other words, economic sanctions were being applied. The chips were down.

It was my first major financial crisis. The problem of how to exist hit me squarely in the face. I spent a bad night after receiving this ultimatum. The parental action had jolted me.

While making my own coffee the next morning, the first measure of economy with which to begin the new era of enforced austerity, I remembered Stewart was now in London. He had once narrated to me how, after a similar parental difference of opinion, he had walked out, left Clifton, his public school, given up Cambridge and driven a fish lorry at Billingsgate in order to establish his right to decide his future. He was now doing well for himself as a top-rate salesman. How had he done it? I thought I had better find out. I rang him up, told him I needed to see him urgently.

"What's on?" he asked.

"A spot of bother with the family", I replied.

"That's nothing. Come round for a drink this evening and we will sort it out".

"This evening!" I exclaimed. "I won't last out that long".

I must have conveyed an adequate sense of urgency for he agreed to meet me for a quick lunch instead.

"There's a new men's shop opened in Piccadilly", he said, "right opposite the Piccadilly Hotel. It's called Simpson's. It sells men's wear, ties, socks, shirts and pants. Let's meet in the snack bar there".

Stewart arrived a little ahead of me and sat himself on a stool. We ordered a sandwich each and coffee. "Let's hear the worst", he started by saying. There was no use mincing words. I came straight to the point. He listened patiently, then he summed up the problem and its solution with the words, "That settles it. We have to find you a job right away. Can't your publishers take you on until you write another book for them?"

I shook my head. Books took time to write. Newspapers too had jobs but not for men in distress. No one commands a price in journalism when the need for money is urgent. "That doesn't help us", Stewart said. "We can't afford to wait".

I felt licked. By the time we finished the coffee I said to Stew. "It looks like home for me".

"Don't be silly", he emphatically said. "You! You, after Oxford, can't find a job in London! I don't believe it. Why not try here?"

"Where?"

"Here, right here", he pointed to the floor.

"Here at Simpson's?"

"Yes, why not? You want a job, any job, something that will keep you going for a few months till your next Bar exams. That's all. This shop has just opened. Surely they can use a man like you".

"Selling pants?"

"Anything. After all I bet you write English better than most of them. Why not try?"

"Now, wait a minute", I said. "Let's be serious".

"I am serious", Stewart interrupted, "dead serious".

"What do I go and say to the Manager — I have no experience, my father has stopped my allowance, give me a job?"

"That's what I would say. Go", he said, "go now, right now. I'll wait".

I did as I was told. I asked the liftman who was the head of the store. "That would be the Managing Director, sir. Top floor, ask for Mr. Sadler".

I got into the lift and asked to be taken up to Mr. Sadler. Like a slow passenger train, it crept up floor by floor, announcing what was on sale at all stations. On each floor, he ended his narration with a sing-song, "Thankyew". Eventually when we arrived at the top floor of the building, I was the only passenger left in his lift. He opened the lift gate for me with a "There you are, sir, turn right".

So I did. I walked on until I saw a good looking young woman, neatly dressed, sitting at a desk. I asked her for Mr. Sadler. "Have you an appointment?" she asked.

"No, I haven't but. . ." In that brief while she had looked me up and down and without waiting to hear my reason for wanting to see Mr. Sadler, she got up from her seat, saying, "I'll see if he is free". I waited. As she came out, she said, "You can go in. Mr. Sadler will see you. Go right in". I did. A very pleasant man in his mid-thirties was at his desk. He asked me to sit down. "What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I won't waste much of your time, Mr. Sadler", I began, "I am an Indian. I have just finished Oxford. I got a second in law, became President of the Union. I was finishing my Bar finals, but failed by two marks in one paper, constitutional law. As a result, my father is a little annoyed. He has stopped my allowance and asked me to return home immediately. So I'm a bit stuck. I want to finish the Bar finals. Can you use me in Simpson's?"

Mr. Sadler who had come forward in his chair to listen carefully to me, leaned back. He recapitulated the details I had rattled off. "President of the Oxford Union!" he repeated. I nodded in confirmation of what seemed the least important detail in terms of a job at a men's department store.

"And a second at Oxford?"

"I did get a second", I assured him.

"I am not doubting you for a moment. And you want a job *here*? Surely you are not thinking of selling pants, socks and shoes?"

"Mr. Sadler, I am at present not in a position to choose my job".

Sympathetically he said, "Have you any idea how you can be of use to us other than as a salesman in the shop?"

An idea occurred to me just then and I thought it out loud. "Yes", I said, "there are thousands of Indians students in England. Every ship brings some more. They all go to Austin Reed because it is a name they know. There must be lists available of the names of these Indian students. I could write to as many as I could get hold of and make them aware of the name of Simpson for their future shopping".

"That's a very good idea", he said. "I think we will try it out. We can start you on three-pound-ten¹ a week with a commission on the business you bring. If that is acceptable, you can begin tomorrow morning. Your time is your own".

I thanked him very much. I now told him my name and spelt it out. He took it down on a piece of paper, held out his hand, saying "See you tomorrow. Come to me first and I'll take you round. We'll get a table for you to work on and one of the girls will type your letters".

It was as easy as that. As I went out, I stopped at the desk of his well-poised secretary, told her she was very kind to have let me in. I wrote down my name for her, adding, "As I'll be working here from tomorrow, you'll need to know it".

I proudly rang for the lift, not sure whether employees were allowed to use it, going down. In the snack bar in the basement Stew was still waiting for me.

"How did it go?"

"I got a job", I said with much relief.

¹ £ 3.10sh.

"I told you", he replied, getting off the stool. He paid the bill. We collected our hats and coats and walked up to street level. As we got out into Piccadilly, Stew said, "Come round and have a drink this evening. I'll teach you how to sell pants". Hurriedly he crossed the road, waving from the other side of Piccadilly. I heaved another sigh of relief. My bus came along and I was on my way home.

That was my first job, at Simpson's in Piccadilly, the shop whose Daks later became so fashionable in men's wear. I certainly made every Indian who came to London aware of it, from a student to a rupee millionaire. I even got India's High Commissioner to London¹, who was a Punjabi Muslim, to come and open an exhibition of pictures in a room in the basement of the store. When he arrived at the shop in his gorgeous, crisp turban, everyone stopped to look at him.

During the months I worked at Simpson's, most happily, I witnessed the sale of Daks to two interesting customers. One was Douglas Fairbanks, senior, whom I had seen play in the film, *The Thief of Baghdad*. With his pencil-thin moustache, with his camel hair swagger coat held in at the waist with a belt, he was still attracting crowds which gathered on the pavement at the entrance to the shop. The other was a royal customer, the late Duke of Kent, who died during the war in an air-crash in 1942. The Duke had bought a pair of Daks, and paid for them with his personal cheque for three guineas. It was pale crimson in colour, had his royal crest on it and was drawn on Coutts, his bankers. The cheque fascinated me. I went up to Sadler to ask if I could keep it and pay for the royal purchase in cash.

"What will you do with a cheque which is made out in our name?"

"I'll frame it. His Royal Highness will save three guineas and I will have an autograph which will one day be worth much more". Sadler said they could not part with a cheque

¹ Sir Feroze Khan Noon.

of the royal family. It had to be banked in the normal way. What a pity, I thought. It would have been a delightful souvenir of my first job and in the event of my ever going broke, any American would pay me ten pounds for it.

The Duke of Kent was unmarried then. He lived in St. James's Palace with his elder brother, Edward, Prince of Wales.¹ 1936 was the jubilee year of King George V's reign which began in the year of my birth, 1911. There was a new night club, the *Jubilee*, opened in Mayfair's Albemarle Street. Millie Hooey of the *Bag of Nails* ran the new club. Smart, rather large, it had a good dance band and attracted a better than average lot of hostesses, young, well-dressed and well-preserved. Some also looked well-kept. I walked into the *Jubilee* one night at midnight. There was a group of people sitting around Millie's table. "Look who's here", the girl with me said. It was again the same handsome Duke of Kent. A gay young bachelor, he had blown in on his way home from some party. England was charmingly democratic; a young prince, the youngest son of the ruling monarch, was chatting to a night club queen.

After a drink and a talk, the Duke was ready to leave. The night club being in the basement, he walked up a flight of steps to the street. I followed him out. The Duke had no car of his own; he got into a taxi outside the *Jubilee* club and gave the driver his address. The old London cabbie nodded his head, started his car and drove off. I wondered whether he was going to another night club. I therefore got into the next taxi and told my driver to follow the cab in front. The Duke's cab turned into Piccadilly, went further down and then turned into Vine Street. It pulled up at the police station in that street so well-known in those days.

I got even more curious. Why would the Duke want to go to Vine Street police station? A policeman swaggered

¹ Later became Duke of Windsor.

over to the taxi. "Whatzermatter?" the bobby asked the driver.

The London cabbie, protective by instinct of princes and palaces, said, "I gotta guy in me cab who wants to go to Saint Jaimzis Palace. Thought I'd better bring 'im here first".

"Saint Jaimzis Palace?", the bobby repeated. "Let's 'ave a look at 'im". With that he swung open the cab door and switched his torch onto the passenger inside.

"Blimey", I heard the policeman say and soon there was consternation in Vine Street. For the policemen discovered it really was the Duke of Kent, perhaps a little sleepy at that late hour of the night. The Duke stepped out. He looked puzzled at finding himself in Vine Street. The bobby had by then called the head constable out and there was a succession of quick salutes, profuse apologies to His Royal Highness who got back into the cab charmingly saying, "Silly man, I said St. James's Palace, not Vine Street police station".

The cab driver now sat rigidly in the front seat of his taxi. He adjusted his peaked cap into a respectable position, stuttered a half dozen "sorry, sirs" and stepped on his accelerator. A brace of police motor cyclists accompanied the cab as outriders all the way down St. James's Street to convoy the scion of the royal house safely to his destination.

I thought the incident quite terrific. The way the Duke had taken it, made a first class human story. I asked my taxi to drive me quickly to the *Daily Herald*, the only London paper where I was known. I rushed to the night editor and told him what had happened.

"Lovely story", he said, "but we can't use it. It's the unwritten code of the British press that the movements of members of the royal family when they are not on official business, are not reported".

So the months passed by, till the time of the next Bar finals exam, for which I appeared with more serious preparation. When I finished my papers I felt I had done well in all of them.

By that time Michael Joseph had gone into production on my book, the one he had commissioned me to write. The sun was beginning to shine for me once again and the old scars of failure were healing fast. With the promise my publisher held out for the success of *I Go West*, I was beginning to wonder whether I should not stay on a little longer to be present for publication day. I was, therefore, in two minds whether to accept my father's renewed offer of a boat ticket to Bombay or to seek some other job more suited to an author about to find recognition in London.

Keith Briant who had introduced me to Mr. Joseph was pressing me to stay on. He had told me about an elderly man, a senior director in an important firm allied to the world of books.

"What is the job?" I inquired.

"Perfect for you", Keith said. "Being an elderly man and having to entertain a lot of important people, he wants someone who can arrange his dinner parties for him, pick his menus, book tables at restaurants, send out his invitations. You'll meet people who can be useful to you and you'll also have all the time you want to write books. What more can you want?"

Somehow I did not relish the idea of being a private secretary or an A.D.C. Selling Daks had generated enough humility in me. It was time I got down to a more serious job. Gandhi in India was doing a man's job. How could an Indian stay away from that epic scene?

With my passage booked on the P & O boat, *Mooltan*, I called on Stew to say good-bye. "You're a mutt, leaving London just when you are about to make your mark here", Stewart said. Those around him in the room were inclined to agree I was acting in haste. "It's a bit late now to change my plans", I said. "I have told Simpson's I am leaving; I have booked my passage. India is getting really interesting".

Stewart kept persisting I was "damn silly", with every drink he poured into my glass. "Get your book out. See how it is received. Then if you want, go to India. Damn silly to go now".

In passing I had mentioned to him what Keith had said about the old man who wanted a personal secretary. "Ring him up", Stewart said.

Under the mellow haze of drink I almost began to feel some sort of oracle was speaking, except that words like "damn silly" were not in the vocabulary of spiritual forces. To others in the room I explained, "I stayed over only to prove to my parents I could stand on my own. I've done it. I've done my exams. Now, I feel I must go".

Finally, a girl in the room agreed with me. She said, "It is your life and your right to decide. We will miss you of course".

So would I miss them. Eight years in England out of the twenty-seven years of my life was quite a substantial part of it. The years at Oxford and in London had made me the man I was, a man of character, with firm roots in the democratic way of life, a budding crusader for the equality of man. I felt a yearning from afar for the freedom of my people. Education was meaningless unless it was put to its fullest use. In England there were so many writers, who had already made their mark in journalism, in politics, in letters. India was still virgin territory for a man of promise.

Even in those days I believed in destiny. I believed that while there was great scope for man to exercise his free will, there were moments when his fate took charge and some strange force shaped or corrected the course of his life. Was this such a moment? Stewart had pushed me into the job at Simpson's. What did his remark "damn silly" mean now?

I got up and went to the telephone in a corner of the room. I looked up the piece of paper in my wallet on which I had written down the telephone numbers of the person Keith had asked me to contact. Being after seven in the

evening, I rang his residential number. A grim, female voice, obviously that of a maid servant, said a wierd "A-low".

"Is that Mr. Grey's residence?" I asked.

"Mister — a — Grey", she said in a most queer, ghost-like voice, the sort of a voice one would hear in a film like *Dracula*. She gave me the creeps.

"Yes", I said, "Is he in?"

"Mister eh Grey? Ooh w-a-n-t-s Mister eh Grey?" Her pronunciation of his name was long drawn out.

"Is he in?" I repeated, getting a trifle impatient.

Then she said, "Mister eh Grey died this morning".

I had gooseflesh all over me. Quietly, I put down the telephone. There was cold sweat on my brow. I remained seated near the telephone with my eyes closed. Someone asked, "Are you all right?" I nodded but not too confidently. This was fate knocking at my door. I did not say anything about my phone call to anyone in the room. Only when Stewart asked me, "For the last time, are you definitely going to India?", I replied, "I am afraid so". Then no one argued any more.

A week later, I was on the *Mooltan* homeward bound. I had arranged that the results of the Bar Finals should be cabled to the ship by radio by my tutor in London. In my constitutional law, in which I had failed the time before, I had made certain that I would get through. No other subject seemed to worry me, but it was better to have the results as soon as they were out. I would then be able to append "Bar-at-Law" to my name and I would have a profession on my return to India.

One morning the anxiously awaited cable arrived. It confirmed that I had passed. All was well. I would now be able to walk down the gang plank at Ballard Pier, Bombay, a successful barrister-at-law, having reversed my earlier

failure. In order that my parents should share the joy of this success, I cabled the good news to them.

It was the next morning after breakfast when I was pacing the deck that a page, tray in hand, brought me another radio telegram. "The start of congratulations", I said as I signed for it. My face fell when I read its contents. The cable was again from my tutor; it read; SORRY SOME MISTAKE YOU FAILED.

I know very few people in the world to whom such a thing could happen. There was no logical explanation why such things kept happening to me.

Cable in hand; I went into a quiet corner of the ship's lounge, unable to speak to anyone, unable to eat or drink and at a loss to know whether I should cable home again before they cabled me. The fault was not mine. I had merely relayed the good news I had received from a responsible person, my tutor. Reality had however to be faced. I had no option but to re-cable my parents.

I came out on the deck and leaned on the rails. There was only sea ahead and in the distance, a horizon. I had no sense of time or space. I kept watching the ship's bow cutting through the water which folded apart. The gong rang for lunch but I must have missed it till a steward came right up to me and said, "The second gong has gone, sir". I walked down to the dining room.

We docked as scheduled at the Mole Station of Bombay's Ballard Pier. Indian coolies, putting up the gangway, were singing out aloud, a traditional way of lessening their work load. Down below I could see my parents who had come to welcome their son. My mother's hair looked distinctly grey; so did my father's. I was aware that a great deal of the age they were showing was to be traced to my erratic performances, all of which could not be blamed on me. My inexplicable failure was very much on everyone's minds when we met but no one spoke of it. As my father was the Collector of Customs, my baggage was instantly cleared. The officer who put his chalk mark on it said, "You couldn't have anything to declare". He was correct.

for I was so broke, I did not have enough to buy a three ha'penny stamp. He sympathised with me for word had gone through the whole Customs House that the boss's son was not returning home a hero.

A few days later the much awaited letter from my law tutor in London, arrived. His opening remarks were apologetic about the mistake he had made. Then he went on to give details of my marks. In constitutional law I was well in the clear. The trip up was in Real Property, by two marks. That came as a great shock, for I hitherto had no trouble in this subject either at Oxford or in my earlier Bar exams. To add to my frustration, this was a subject which would be totally useless to me in India where property was governed by Hindu law, Muslim law, Parsi law and so on.

There was another odd aspect about the result of this examination. I found I was exempt from this paper, because of my honours marks in Oxford. How could I be declared failed in a subject in which I need not be examined? This was a point none of the syllabus framers had thought of. No one but I would run into such a problem. I wrote to London for clarification only to be told that there was a procedure for an appeal to the Bar Council which, it seems, was hardly ever resorted to. Further, that in order to discourage such appeals, they were required to be made to the Bar Council in Latin!

I knew my argument, now I had to work it into my best Latin. I sat down, drafted it out and sent it off to London. Some months later I heard, to my surprise, that the Bar Council had allowed my appeal. I was declared to have passed in the exam in which I was earlier declared to have failed! I was also called to the Bar *in absentia*, which is not unusual. But I doubt if there is any case except mine in which a student declared to have failed has been called to the Bar without appearing for any further examination. So I made some contribution to the history of the English Bar!

My delayed victory could not be broadcast, except to

the Registrar of the Bombay High Court to whom the necessary certificate had to be produced before I could devil for senior counsel, a procedure essential to practice at the Bar. While I was still fumbling with these formalities I got myself a job at the *Bombay Chronicle*, a newspaper then in the front line of the struggle for Independence. My salary was only Rs. 450 per month. My name appeared on the muster roll for all nine years of my service below the juniormost sepoy and there was no designation against my name. When I announced at the family lunch table that I had got a job on the *Bombay Chronicle*, my father dismissed my announcement as a joke. He said, "I know you've done a lot of stupid things in your life, but I don't think you will do anything as silly as that". But I had.

It was December 1938.

9

She 'fired' the Viceroy of India

JOURNALISM IN India was not the profession I thought it would be. At one extreme it resembled the impoverished profession of school teachers who begin with great visions of moulding the mind of a new generation but who end up in the side-streets of poverty. At the other end, when journalism is lucrative, it can resemble the life of a successful prostitute, paying lip-service to whoever is calling the tune and paying the bill. Very few in the profession are able to steer a middle course, combining a crusade with successful business. But journalism has had for me quite a few interesting moments, not so much at the office desk but on assignments most of which I created for myself. Maybe I was lucky.

When I joined the *Chronicle*, there was no pungent personal column in India, pithily written. The only column was that of Pothan Joseph, called *Over a cup of tea*. It was much read, liked and appreciated but in a style which was far too gentle, almost Victorian. With much persuasion my editor, a quiet unassuming Muslim who wholeheartedly supported the Gandhian movement, agreed to let me try my hand at a racy, controversial column which would appear daily.

"A whole column?", he at first exclaimed. "That would be too much. No one would read it". Then, noticing my disappointment, he relented. "I don't mind half a

column", he said. I accepted the space given to me and called it "The Half-Column", the way he had described it. It was "By Dim", a pen name I chose for myself. Some believed the pseudonym was indicative of the state of mind of its writer. Those accustomed to be the first to laugh at their own jokes and puns referred to the column as being written "by Dim Wit", by "Half Wit" and so on. DIM was however, taken from the words below my Oxford crest, *Dominus Illuminatio Mea*.¹ The laughter continued, but so did my column. Only when someone figured in it himself, did his laughter abruptly stop, for there was a lot of power behind it and it produced an occasional thrust. It also contained a great deal of commonsense which was difficult to ignore.

Another feature I did for the *Chronicle* was headed, *I Cover The Town*. The name of the town changed as I moved around in India, usually by train, attempting to understand something of my country and my people. This was in main a serious feature, dealing with politics, people and industry. Occasionally there was a great urge to be frivolous but with my editor, Syed Abdulla Brelvi, sitting late at night at his desk in Bombay, blue pencil in hand, it was wasted effort to move away from the straight and narrow path he had chalked out as the policy of the paper.

There was one occasion for instance when my host in Calcutta successfully convinced two high government officials, one a senior magistrate, the other a deputy commissioner of police, that I should be shown the red light districts of that city. Calcutta for the purpose of police administration was divided into four sectors, each directly in charge of a deputy commissioner. We met for dinner after which the two officials and an Anglo-Indian superintendent of police escorted me to the Sonagachi area where the girls were all Indian, some of them remarkably good looking, ranging in age from twenty to thirty.

¹ Latin for 'God is my light'.

As we stepped out of the car at the first group of crowded tenements, the reception we received was quite overpowering. Three pretty girls rushed out of their respective rooms, each carrying a thick, tightly strung garland of heavily scented flowers, with which we were ceremoniously garlanded. This was the traditional Indian welcome. The superintendent of police stood by, his sola topee in hand. The sola, not solar, topee is the headgear Stanley¹ wore when he ran into Dr. Livingstone at Lake Tanganyika².

We were escorted into a sitting room, gaudily decorated in Indian style, where a young Bengali pimp, dressed for the occasion in a silk shirt, played the role of master of ceremonies. The head girl asked him to open a bottle of whisky, which had been purchased in honour of our visit. Four glasses had already been laid on a silver-plated salver and everything indicated that our arrival had earlier been intimated to this bawdy house. Normal business was at a standstill that night and everyone in the locality had come out to watch us being entertained.

We had a short drink and after exchanging a few words of polite conversation, we moved to another house in the same locality where the reception was equally cordial, three more garlands and another bottle of the same brand of whisky. Everywhere the welcome was according to a set pattern, most unusual in such houses where business normally takes precedence over garlands and whisky. Moreover, when we offered to pay for the drinks we had consumed, both houses which had received us so generously would not hear of it.

"*Poysha*?!", said the head girl, her hands folded in the traditional *namaskar*. "For what?" she said in Bengali, shaking her head from side to side, indicating she would accept no money from us. "It is too much honour for her", the English-speaking pimp interpreted. Sentiments so expressed were pretty to listen to but this, I knew, was not genuine brothel behaviour or language. Some of the girls standing by were so pretty that had it not been for the stiff

¹ Henry M. Stanley.

² 1871.

³ Bengali for money.

company in which I had come, I might have had thoughts of lingering a little longer.

We made a third call at yet another house where the routine was exactly the same — three jasmine garlands, one more bottle of the same whisky and again pretty words of welcome. Absolutely perfect courtesy, clean girls in white silk saris with fresh flowers worn in their hair, and everywhere, new unopened bottles of whisky. I turned to the Anglo-Indian policeman escorting us and said, "Very good arrangement you have made", to which he replied, "Boss said there must be *pucca bandobast*¹ made for you to see and write about".

"We must have ruined their business by our visit", I commented.

"No business today", he admitted, "not till you leave".

"Then I feel we should leave soon and allow them to get on with their normal business".

"Up to you, sir", said the efficient superintendent of police, standing to attention. "Good chap", the deputy commissioner said later. "He takes his work very seriously". I readily agreed.

It was time to leave. As we got into the car and started to drive away, I asked the superintendent, who sat beside the driver, "Where is the other place which is called Watgunge?"

"Watgunge, sir?" he asked, taken aback by my knowledge of various red light districts of Calcutta.

"Yes, let's have a look at that also", I said.

There was a noticeable silence in the car. The deputy commissioner made no comment. The superintendent then perked up to say, "But that quarter is all Japanese".

"What's wrong with the Japanese?" I asked. As it was much before the Japanese entered the war, exchange of courtesies would not be misunderstood. "Let's have a look".

The deputy commissioner half-heartedly agreed. He pointed out that Watgunge did not come within his jurisdic-

¹ Words commonly used by the Indian police, meaning 'proper arrangements'.

tion. "Even so, let's go", I pleaded. So we drove towards Watgunge.

As we approached the district, we saw rows of squat little houses, each with a small garden in front. They appeared dimly lit from outside. Our car stopped in front of one of them. I rang the doorbell and an old woman with a heavily scarred face, dressed in a kimono, opened the door to us. She bowed in the traditional Japanese way, uttering the words of welcome, "*Muchi muchi*". The scene was out of a fairy story, with a Japanese lantern and a witch thrown in. We were shown into the living room and told to wait.

No one spoke for a while. Then a pretty youngster, also Japanese, who could not have been more than eighteen years of age, came out from one of the inner rooms. She sat on a chair beside the old woman, who now looked more horrible than ever. The old battle-axe uttered just one word, "So", and everyone turned towards her. She loosened up in conversation saying, "Who go first?" I looked towards our high police official hoping he would reply to her. Our visit was a reconnaissance tour; it was not expected to result in any action. While this had been made known to the houses in Sonagachi, which came within the deputy commissioner's jurisdiction, it was not known in Watgunge. I made bold to lead the conversation in reply. "We three people — one, two, three", I said, pointing to the magistrate, the deputy commissioner and myself. "We must have three plitty girls like this one. Only one, no good", I said.

"She take you all — ten luppees, short time", she replied, leaving us speechless. The poor girl referred to, sat motionless and so prettily still. She moved only to adjust the folds of her kimono.

There was a long pause during which the three of us merely looked at each other, not knowing what to do or say. As no one would say a word, I was left to handle this uncomfortable situation. "Only one girl?" I repeated, "and we are three. How that can be? She plitty girl, so we fight, who go first".

Even the dumbest person listening to my lamentably forced conversation would have been aware it was a pathetic effort to be clever or funny. The old girl, however, ignored my remarks, saying, "No fight. Ten luppees, short time, take you all."

"Okay", I said. "If one go, what others will do? Must have drink. Bring drink. We pay."

"No drink", the old girl firmly replied. "Only bizness. Ten luppees, short time, take you all." She was quite assertive, firmly laying down her terms of business.

"No drink? Then what we two can do?" I pointed to the magistrate and myself, giving the deputy commissioner the honour of starting the proceedings. It must have petrified him. "Muss have limonade if you got no whisky", I told the madame.

"No whisky", she said, "no limonade. Only bizness here". She was clearly getting impatient with me. She spat out some angry words, part English and part Japanese. The latter were addressed to her inmate.

"So", she said again, thumping her hands on the arms of her chair, "No waste time". Her remarks were directed to me, the only one of the three carrying on conversation with her. "No waste time", she repeated, "or you go". She pointed to the door.

I looked at my police chief for help. The deputy commissioner stirred in his chair, showing signs of restlessness. His superintendent did not know how to bring this law and order situation under control.

"Wait one minute", I said to the horrible old woman. Then, pointing to the deputy commissioner, I asked her, "You know who he is?"

"Who he?" she asked, obviously not caring a damn.

I produced the vital information. "He deputy commissioner of police", I said. "You no can speak to big policeman like that". That, I was sure would put the fear of god into any brothel keeper anywhere.

The ball was in her court, but with the agility of a

Japanese playing a ball game, she snapped back, "Deptycommplice?"

"That's right", I said, very pleased with myself. I thought this would give us the upper hand. But I had underestimated the wrath of this woman. Pointing to the high police official, she said, "You fluck off".

I have never seen our gallant Indian police which had handled unruly crowds during the British *raj* and who later were to subdue even more furious rioting under governments run by the Indians themselves, so dazed, so speechless, so numb.

"Oi,, oi, oi", I said. "You no can use bad language to deputy commissioner of police". I raised my voice since everyone else was so meek, mild and silent.

But nothing I said frightened the old Japanese ex-whore. She stood up, extended her right hand and with her forefinger pointed to the door she gave the order, "Then all fluck off".

This salvo of abuse from an old Japanese battle-axe was too much for us. We got up, all four of us. Our exit was a disgrace to India's manhood. She banged the door behind us. Shaken by the gruff treatment of Watgunge as compared with the smooth hospitality of Sonaguchi, it was decided we should go home to bed. On the way back, in the car, there was some crosstalk between the two policemen, a discussion on what action should be taken to restore the prestige of Calcutta's police force. The deputy commissioner showed belated signs of annoyance. "She should control her language", he said. "We can close down that brothel", he threatened. But the Anglo-Indian superintendent calmed him down with cool words of wisdom. "As you wish, sir", he said. "But it really doesn't come within our jurisdiction". That put the whole incident in its right perspective. The file was closed.

Journalism in India, or anywhere else was not ready to print a story such as this, essential to training in that profession. There is a mistaken belief among many that journalism consists, in main, of expressing an opinion.

This, however, is but the smallest function of modern journalism. Its essence is to absorb the content of a story and to relate it without allowing the personality of the writer to intrude on it.

Outside the general post office in Bombay, in the days before literacy swept through our country, there used to sit a row of *munshis* on the pavement. A *munshi*, like a *pandit*, is a learned man though to a lesser extent, bearing in mind that India is a country where learning only implies the ability to read and write. There used to be a variety of *munshis* outside the G.P.O. depending on the language in which his services were required to write a man's letter to his *muluk* or native village. The men who came seeking menial jobs in a big city like Bombay felt the need to communicate with their families at home. So they would come to the *munshi* who charged an anna for writing a postcard or four annas for a four-page letter. These letters all began, as they do even today, somewhat like an archaic document; "To Manilal, son of Jivanbhai Prema of village Khajoori, Taluka Bulsar, District Surat, Gujarat; greetings from his loyal and dutiful nephew Dhulabbhai who wishes him good health and prosperity".

That would be the rough start of a letter and given the names, the *munshi* would begin it in accordance with the time-worn formula.

"Then?" the *munshi*, quill pen in hand, would ask.

"Tell him that for the last two months I have been out of a job".

The *munshi* would communicate the message in *Gujarati*, the regional language of District Surat. He would read out the written text to ensure correct transmission of the nephew's thoughts to the uncle. "Then?"

"As I have no money I have had to borrow at high interest and now my debt is over two hundred rupees", the nephew would spill out his tale of woe.

An ending to such a letter would be a polite request for a loan, seldom repaid among members of the family. The letter or postcard in reply would have to be brought

to the *munshi* for reading aloud at the cost of one anna per epistle. Sometimes such an exchange of correspondence would contain such words of abuse as "you drunken son of a bitch" or whatever may be the equivalent regional phrase. The *munshi*, however, would be no part of the fond message or the lewd abuse. That was clearly understood. It is this aloofness that is the basis of journalism, this detachment which is the essence of straight reportage, an amorality in the transcription of a scene or in the narration of a story, without getting involved in it. But only very few can attain it. A journalist should not belong to a political party for the discipline of the party is bound to infringe on his freedom of expression.

Brelvi encouraged me to go out to get a story. One such occasion was in the second half of 1943. It arose out of a statement made in the British House of Commons by the Right Honourable Leopold Amery, who was His Majesty's Secretary of State for India. Amery was speaking on "the present difficult food situation in India" and he enumerated four reasons which had given rise to such a situation:

One, the tendency of Indian cultivators to withhold foodgrains from the market;

Two, hoarding;

Three, difficulties of transportation; and

Four, the fact that Indians were eating more per capita as a result of increased incomes!

The last named reason which he gave was shocking, for barely two weeks passed after that utterance when we read in our morning papers that as many as twenty-nine dead bodies had been recovered from the streets of Calcutta, and that these deaths were due to starvation. Brelvi then decided to send me to East Bengal to collect details of this gruesome story.

The difficulties of transportation to which Mr. Amery had referred were to be traced to the "Denial Policy" of the Bengal Government. Burma had fallen and there was panic in official circles lest the Japanese penetrate further and cross our eastern frontier. The British Governor of Bengal then thought of pursuing a policy of economic scorched earth whereby large numbers of boats and barges essential to the farmer of East Bengal for the transportation of his foodgrains were destroyed. As East Bengal has always been dependent on its network of rivers as its main line of communication, the burning of rivercraft brought food transport to a virtual standstill. With no hope of marketing his crops, the farmer was discouraged from growing any more than he required for his personal consumption. Consequently the soil deteriorated and the harvest suffered. Additionally, nature played havoc with the crops. There were cyclones and floods, a common feature of India. With no reserves to fall back upon, famine stared the people in the face.

So I went, first to Calcutta, then onward by slow train, an odd river boat, a bullock cart and even on foot into remote villages of East Bengal. By that time, thirty thousand people were estimated to be dying of starvation every week. Wherever we camped, we could see corpses being carried for cremation every quarter of an hour. They were pathetic little funerals with the dead being carried on little bamboo biers. There were no mourners except the pall bearers themselves. The spectre of death in such rapid sequence and in so primitive a fashion was a frightening sight.

In one of the villages I visited, my guide was a local pleader.¹ He was not the sort of man who had enough imagination to invent a story. I had to believe what he told me. "A week ago", he said, "I was sitting here and I saw a woman across the road feeding her child. She did not move. It went on like that for over two hours.

¹ A small town lawyer

Then I noticed some people gather around her. I went across to see what was happening. I found the woman was dead but the child who was alive was struggling to drink milk out of its dead mother's breast".

I was shown another woman in the village whose child had died. She had been given four rupees by the local authorities to have it cremated. Instead of buying the wood with the money she was given, she managed to collect some firewood herself. The cremation thus cost her nothing. The authorities who came to know of this, claimed that the money she was given should be refunded to them, as it was not used. The woman maintained that the money was now hers for she had cremated her child. "I can keep the profit I made", she told the village headman, "because the child was mine". Hunger, the pleader lamented, had brought a new depth of depravity to his village.

I saw a group of boys and girls fight for an empty coconut husk which my bearer had thrown away after drinking the coconut-water from it.—There could not have been more than an ounce of coconut left inside. The same servant stopped eating and gave his plate of food to three little kids who were mournfully looking at him as he came out on the verandah, food in hand. No one could eat, when all around were dying of hunger.

Returning from Madaripur, the furthest point east which I touched, I caught the midnight steamer which brought me along the Padma river via Goalundo, back to Calcutta, the opulent city. It was late at night when I left my shack in Madaripur to catch the steamer docked at the quayside. Along little winding paths we walked in the bright moonlight under the shadow of tall palm trees. The tin-covered huts of the townspeople lined both sides of the path. Everyone seemed asleep for no light could be seen in these homes. It was so quiet we could hear our own breathing in the dark. Then through the quiet, we heard the wail of a lonely child. He was lying huddled on the doorstep of someone's shack, his little hands holding his head as if he were feeling giddy and about to faint. We switched a

torch onto him. He was a little fellow barely three or four years old. He kept muttering something in Bengali which I could not understand. I asked the man walking beside me what the youngster was saying, "He is saying: Ma, I am going, give me only a little to eat before I die". I turned to my man servant and asked if we had anything left in our bags we could give him. An unopened tin of sardines was all he could produce. "No, sir", the escort said, "If you give this to him he will die." Just then, the door of the hut opened and a young though emaciated woman held out a piece of *chappati*, flat wheaten bread. The boy stopped wailing as he took what was given to him. The door of the hut closed. Silently, we walked on to the quayside, boarded the little steamer which puffed its way downstream.

I returned to Calcutta shaken by the nightmare I had seen. I steadied my shattered nerves for I was then still a young man. I realised I was being groomed in the toughest school of journalism, receiving my first inoculation to human misery which was later to stand me in good stead.

In Calcutta, there was little realisation of the vastness of the surrounding tragedy. The city papers carried reports of the Bengal famine, but reading about it was one thing, seeing it at close quarters had given me an entirely different picture. To convey it to those away from the scene I had visited, I had to be cold, almost brutal, in reportage. The slightest trace of emotion in a narrative can destroy the authenticity of a report, however accurate it may otherwise be.

Shaved, showered and dressed in clean clothes, I walked down Calcutta's main street, Chowringhee, to Firpo's restaurant to have my first meal in three weeks. Near the entrance to the restaurant I saw a naked man being carried away by the police in a hurriedly called ambulance. His body was so emaciated, there was absolutely no flesh on it. His bottom was curved in, instead of being curved out as in the normal human form. As I went near him, I noticed he stared into space, for his eyes were wide open.

Nothing about him moved. It was therefore difficult to say whether he was numbed by hunger into unconsciousness, or whether he was dead. The police seemed anxious to remove him quickly, lest anyone should ask how he got there in the first place.

Upstairs, on the first floor of Firpo's, the place was packed. My host was waiting for me at the long bar where everyone was discussing how terrible was the news about the starvation deaths. After a few gins we went into the restaurant to eat. The waiter, realising I was a visitor to Calcutta, suggested that I should try smoked hilsa. "That's our river fish", he clarified.

"Fresh?", I asked.

"Absolutely fresh", he assured me. "It only arrived this morning".

"It must have come down the river with me", I told him, but I doubt if he understood.

It was perhaps because of journalism, and sometimes using it as a shield, that I delved into avenues which to the orthodox would be taboo. Some years later for a bet which was worth more in prestige value than cash, I drove a friend through a sunset-to-dawn curfew in an area of Bombay in which there had been the most violent rioting earlier the same day. The bet was of a hundred rupees. After a dinner party which we both attended, wearing stiff shirts and black ties, we got into my famous two-seater Imperial Chrysler and I drove him towards the curfewed area, saluted all the way by the armed police squads on night duty.

The area happened to be the main artery of Bombay's red light district in which at that time were several well-known houses of prostitution, abodes of singing girls also dabbling in the same profession and a tram terminus. All I had to do was to slow down my car as we approached the

curfewed area and at the first group of policemen, armed with *lathis*¹, come to a halt. The head policeman of the group naturally came up to me, originally intending to question me or to tell me that I could not drive any further. But before he could utter any comment, I sternly asked him, "*Sub theek hai?*", which was Hindi for 'all in order?'

"*Ha sahib*", he smartly replied, drawing himself to attention. Even though he had never seen me in his police force, he presumed I was someone of considerable importance to be able to question him with so much authority. Rather than reveal his ignorance about my identity, it was safer to salute me at once.

"Good", I said in Hindustani. "Keep a sharp look out for any trouble". Then, with a glance at the brass plate on his leather belt on which his number appeared, I added, "I shall hold you responsible".

"*Ha sahib*", traditional Indian for "yes sir", he replied, saluting me a second time, a ritual in which the others near him, joined.

As groups of pickets were posted within fifty yards of each other and as my car had been allowed to pass by the first group after much saluting, other policemen along the route started saluting me even before I came to them. I reciprocated the salute and drove on, as if I were on an inspection round that night. So we toured the curfew area as we liked until my friend meekly produced a hundred rupee note from his wallet, saying, "I didn't believe it was possible. But do they know you?"

"I hope they don't", I replied, adding "and if you would like to make it double or quits, I'll stop over and stand you a whisky and soda somewhere here". This at the height of prohibition in Bombay was regarded as somewhat of an impossibility.

"No thank you. I won't bet. But you can stand me the drink".

So I pulled up the car at a well-known brothel of those

¹ Thick bamboo sticks

days, run by a most charming woman of good looks, middle-aged and of foreign nationality. It was mainly foreign women of varied origins who ran the bawdy houses of the big Indian cities, using local labour cheaply available. "Madame" was the name by which they were called both by the girls and the customers. The real names of these madames, as also of the girls, were never known to anyone except perhaps to the police who must have had fuller details in their dossiers.

Every house of private entertainment in this area was closed that night because of the curfew and even the *chowkidar*¹ was not sitting out at the front door as he normally did. He could have been shot if he had.

I parked my car in front of this house, got out and rang the door bell. All the lights were out but female voices could be heard talking in whispers behind the closed door. They were hesitating to open it. Confidently I said, "It is all right. You can open the door. We have only come for a drink. We are thirsty".

Then silently a chain was unlatched, but not enough for the door to be opened. "Come on", I said "I am thirsty". By this time madame had come to look out of the first floor window. "Who it is?", she asked, peering through the dark. She could not recognise me under the light of the street lamp below. "It's curfew", she protested.

"We are looking after the curfew", I said. "So open up".

"All right", she said. Then calling out to her head girl, she gave the order that the door should be opened. As we entered, she switched on more lights. "My goodness", she said, "aren't you afraid of being shot?"

"We might have been if you had not opened the door", I replied.

"Come up", she said more cordially, "but how can you do this?" Then, as if someone had hit her with a brick, she said, "Ah! journalist. You can go any place".

Very soon, we were seated in a room away from the road

¹ Watchman

so that the lights could not be seen from outside. A glass of whisky and soda was beside each of us. A small peg cost seven and a half rupees. Expensive, we thought, but excusable at that hour of the night.

It was not alcohol that made us visit a bawdy-house for a drink. It was a desire to assert oneself against any restriction we considered unreasonable, puritanic, dictatorial and based on no standards which we younger men were prepared to accept. While we were reasonably disciplined young men, the domination by administrations run by village yokels produced an instinctive resistance in us for which there was no satisfactory explanation. That is why we delighted in breaking the prohibition law. Maybe it is the effect of Mars on the natal chart, but this only the *pandits* would know if they gazed long enough at the imperishable green leaves on which their ancestors had scribbled words of wisdom centuries ago.

If it was not thirst for drink, it was certainly not lust for holding in one's hands the raddled flesh of the women offered to us as companions. "You come all the way here", the same madame had once said to me, "half a peg of whisky you have, you pay, leave good tip and go away, but you never stay. I was worried before that you might be policeman without uniform who is coming to check up. But then I find out". Her English would not have got her through an 'O' level examination. It had a distinct twang about it but her accent was not French nor from any of the known parts of the world from which madames of her type migrated to India. Unquestionably in her youth she must have been a stunningly beautiful woman, even well-born, yet perhaps due to circumstances known to her alone, she seemed to have missed taking the right road after some main cross-road of her life. That I could not have been far from wrong became evident to me from what she told me on another day. "Ah, I am so glad you come. I wait for you many days".

"What have you got, a new girl or something?"

"My dear, I no waste my time finding girl for you".

In self-defence, I made my first pass at her, saying, "Now it would be different if I could take you home".

"Oh!" she said in a guffaw of laughter, "you take me?"

"You are quite attractive, you know".

With a swipe of her hand through the air, she said, "Thirty-five! Love-making is finish for me. Too ole". I would not have thought so, but it would have served no purpose to enter into an academic argument on that subject. "You haven't told me why you are glad that I came", I said.

"Ah!", she said, her mind returning briskly to her main line of thought. "I want you to write one letter for me. They say you write good. So I say next time you come I ask you to write this letter". In other words, a *munshi* job, like the ones outside the post office in Bombay.

"Have you got yourself into some kind of trouble?", I asked, aware that although some people believed I could make trouble, others may also more generously attribute the constructive qualities of a trouble-shooter to me.

"No trouble", she said. "I want from you one nice letter of thanks. You charge for writing, I pay".

"To whom", I asked light-heartedly, "do I write this letter of thanks?"

"She very nice lady. She write to me. So I say I must to write back to her. So I ask you".

"But who is she? What's her name?"

"She is one Mrs. Churchill", madame replied. "from London".

"Mrs. who?", I asked. I felt I must have got that name wrong. In any case it could not be the one who came instantly to my mind.

"Mrs. Churchill", she repeated as clear as a bell. "Her husband, he is very important fellow in the British government in London".

"Mrs. Churchill?" I slowly repeated. "Mrs. Winston Churchill?"

"I donno. But she put different name. Clem, Clem, something. I show you afterwards the letter she wrote me".

"Clementine?" I asked. It could not possibly be her. Mistaken identity? From 10 Downing Street to this grubby little whore shop in Bombay's notorious red light district, in the heart of which madame received her letter? Impossible, I thought. "What made her write to you?" I asked, betraying no undue surprise.

"It is a long story", she replied and began to unravel it for me. "You see one day I read in papers how all this fighting is going on. All these German Nazi bastards bombing Stalingrad and Rawshian women and children is suffering. No money, no clothes and the poor children shivering in the cold in Rawshia. I know how cold it can be and more cold when you have no proper clothes. So I say, what I can do to help? Then someone is telling me why I don't send money to one lady in London who is collecting for Rawshian women and children. So I ask who is this lady and what is her address. Then one friend of mine, learned fellow like you, he tell me, send to one Viceroy who is agent of British government. So I ask his address and they tell me just put Viceroy of India, New Delhi, and it will to reach him. So I do. I write a cheque for ten thousand rupees, and my friend write letter for me which I sign, in which I say this money is for poor Rawshian woman and children, please to send it for me".

"Ten thousand rupees!" I checked on the figure she had mentioned, by no means convinced by her story which appeared to be either gross exaggeration or an entire fabrication. But I was interested and I asked her to go on.

"Ten thousand", she said with a nod of the head. "I know it is not much for so many Rawshian women and children but something, even little, I must send, I feel. I send my cheque". I did not interrupt her, waiting for her to continue. "After a few weeks I got letter with very posh monogram. It say His Excellency Viceroy is thanking me for my most generous gift which he is putting into war puppusses fund. So I get mad. I say what puppuses? I send money for poor Rawshian women and children

and if he cannot to send, return my money immediately. I want no puppusses. How he can put my money in any puppusses when I send for Rawshian women and children? So I 'fire' the bugger". The idea of a brothel keeper in Bombay ticking off His Excellency the Viceroy of India, the embodiment of British rule in India, amused me no end.

"Good for you", I said.

"I fire him good and proper, my dear".

It was just as well I was not asked to draft her letter to the Viceroy at this heated and controversial stage of the correspondence.

"Then what happened?"

"Then he write back. He say okay then, if I no want the money to go for war puppusses, he will send to London where this lady is collecting for Rawshian women and children. Okay, I say, fine. That I don't mind. Then I wait and in one-two weeks I get a letter, so nicely written, so appreciative — from this lady, this Mrs. Churchill".

"Mrs. Churchill?" I checked once again. "Did she write herself or was it her secretary?"

"No, no", she said, "no secretary. She sign by her own self. Wait, I show you". She called out to one of her trusted girls, "Delise, get that letter from my cupboard; it's inside the drawer".

A short, dark Goan girl, who had been listening to our talk, took a bunch of keys from madame. "That small typed grey letter?" Delise asked.

"Yes dear. Get it, I want to show to this gentleman".

Delise brought it and put it into my hands. It was the small grey mimeographed air-letter used during the war. It confirmed what madame had said. Choicely worded, Mrs. Churchill thanked the donor by name for her very kind gift which would go towards the fund for the very purpose madame had in mind. The letter was signed 'Clementine Churchill'.

10

The blackened palm, the change of voice

MY MOTHER made frequent references to the remarkable feeling of inner peace she experienced through prayer and also to some amazing spiritual phenomena of which she had become aware. Occasionally when we, her grown-up children, were in personal trouble of some sort which was not infrequent, we would ask her to tell us more. There was, however, a natural resistance in me to subjugate logic and the power of reasoning to believe in spiritual forces or to accept the theory of a predestined fate and that power of prayer could alter the course of events. Prayer, I regarded as a ritual, part of the discipline which an individual aware of his God had to maintain. But I did not think any power accrued from it or that such things as spiritual forces existed, much less that they could manifest themselves to us, the living. The thought that anyone else had any affinity with any spiritual forces closer to the Supreme Being, superior to that which I as an ordinary person had, was difficult to believe. Yet when I saw my mother, book in hand and her head covered with a small lace handkerchief, reading the *Zend Avesta*, the prayer book of the Zoroastrian Parsis, I would often call to her, "Say a prayer for me".

"What's wrong with you? Can't you say it yourself?", she would reply.

"Nobody will listen to my prayers. Prayer needs con-

centration which you, with practice, have acquired. If I were to start saying a prayer, my mind would wander on to a woman or a race horse or to a hand of cards. Your prayer, on the other hand, is pure, concentrated, unselfish — and surely you can pray for your son”.

“I pray for you in any case, my boy”, she replied, “but what you say is not correct. You don’t want to believe that you yourself can acquire such a thing as faith. You want someone to do it for you”. I agreed it was easier to pass the responsibility of my salvation on to her. “Your prayers will be heard; mine won’t”, I insisted.

“You have never tried. But as you get older you may settle down to the idea of humbling yourself before your God. That’s what you lack, humility”.

This was just part of a casual conversation between mother and son one evening after she had finished her usual prayers.

Mother sometimes spoke of a Parsi lady she knew, middle-aged and of Irani descent who had a rare gift bestowed on her. By uttering a *kalam* which consisted of words of Muslim prayer, she was able to have the presence of one of the greatest saints of Islam with whom to commune. This was done through the medium of another spirit who, it seems, played the part of an intermediary. In the early stages it was too complicated to understand, so remote from normal belief that I made little attempt to delve into the details of how it happened. I contented myself by communicating my questions or my problems to my mother who in turn would ask the Parsi lady. A few days later I would be told what the answer was. On that answer I would ponder, but I would not necessarily act. I felt my own judgment should make the final decision on any important matter at issue.

This power which was a *bakshesh*,¹ meaning a divine gift, as also the *kalam* which this Parsi lady alone knew, were given to her by a holy man who was known to have performed miracles during his life-time. He was then the keeper of

¹ Not to be confused with *bakshish* which is a monetary tip.

a *dargah*, which means the burial place of saints, known as Takia Shareef at Kakori, fourteen miles from Lucknow in north India. *Takia* can mean *gadi* or throne or cushion; in reality it is on just a cushion covered with the coarsest cotton cloth of bright scarlet, that successive head priests of the Kakori *dargah* sit, when they officially receive anyone, but that is purely the form maintained. The word *shareef* means holy. This shrine is known to be a power house which can give strength to the weak, health to the sick and all manner of help to those who come to it with belief.

Takia Shareef has the tombs of the Kalandar Shahs,¹ a line of Sufis, mystics and *hazrats*. Here also, in two separate glass capsules, is a hair both of the prophet Mohammed and of Hazrat Ali. That of Ali is said to be unique because out of the original hair, branches have sprouted.

This lady was also privileged to light a lamp in her home, a primitive '*divo*', which generally consists only of a cotton wick dipped in sweet oil placed in a squat tumbler of thick, coarse glass. Any housewife can light a *divo*, the normal purpose of which would be to provide light in the house, but because of the special gift bestowed on my mother's friend, it was said that whoever came to pray at the particular *divo* she lit in the prayer room of her house and asked for help, whatever may be the difficulty the individual faced, that request for help would not go unheeded.

The *divo* in the Parsi lady's prayer room was a little more sophisticated in appearance than that used in the villages of India. Instead of a stubby glass holding the oil, the container looked like a saucer, made of pure silver. Also, the oil used for keeping the flame alight was pure *ghee*, rarified butter, once used for cooking in India but now prohibitive in price. Who the giver of this benefice to her was and who the spirit was who heard the numerous appeals for help, we were not as yet aware. But mother, who sometimes visited this Parsi lady's place, was of the opinion that several of her prayers had been answered. While I

¹ Some spell it Qalandar Shah

often avidly listened to the interesting stories mother narrated. I was of the belief that mother as she grew older, was becoming susceptible to supernatural and spiritual forces the existence of which we, who still relied on logic and reasoning, could not entertain. Moreover, because of the Muslim content of that benefice, it seemed a departure from our own Zoroastrian religion. "But we are not Muslims", I said to mother who herself was a very staunch Parsi. "Nor is she", mother replied, referring to the Parsi lady who had acquired these powers. "You should go and see her one day. I have told her about you".

Oxford educated, a writer of books, a journalist who was just beginning to make his mark in his country, a sophisticated young man fond of wearing an expensive Saville Row suit, a competent snake-hips dancer who had prowled the night clubs of Paris, a bachelor with an eye for an attractive woman whether she was married or unmarried, fond of horse racing, owning at that time a half-share in a good race horse, fond of playing cards for high stakes — bridge, poker, *chemin de fer* — till late hours of the night in the toughest gambling schools in town, fond of good living and invited out almost all the seven days of the week, able easily to hold his drink irrespective of how long the party lasted; how could I go and visit a Parsi lady who communed with a holy spirit?

"I know you don't believe in these things", my mother said, "but you say a journalist has to enquire into every story. A story such as this should attract you." When she put it in terms of journalism as different from religion, she touched me on a sensitive spot. I felt obliged to inspect the phenomenon she spoke of, confident that I could detect the flaw in her belief.

Religion and superstitious beliefs were only for weak and mediocre minds. That was my arrogance. When I first met Buchman and his group¹ in Oxford in 1934, I conceded that their work did infinite good to those who

¹ Later known as Moral Rearmament.

needed anchorage in some faith. But I held that the movement which grew out of it was not meant for those like me who had faith in their own ability to face a problem and solve it. "Guidance is no use to anyone who aims at becoming a leader", I said to those who tried unsuccessfully to persuade me to join the Oxford Group.

On my return to India, however, I became fascinated by palmists, horoscope readers and *pandits* dabbling in astrology. This was understandable because everyone instinctively wishes to have advance knowledge of what is going to happen in the future. With such advance information in one's possession, one would feel a step ahead of the rest of the fold. It would have the same value as a scoop. To my mother in whom I could always confide, I said, "I have got rather overfond of a girl and I want to find out how this relationship will turn out. If this Parsi lady will allow me to ask her such questions, I would be most interested in meeting her. Ask her and see what she says". I left it at that.

Some weeks passed, during which my mother had visited her religious friend several times. One day she rang me to say she had a message for me. I went over for lunch. "You are lucky", my mother said. "You are being given a *bethak*".

"What's that?"

"A *bethak* means a sitting. It would in effect correspond to a seance. The spirit that helps her will actually be present at the time. It will be a live interview as it were". I was told the date and the time when I was to come. It all sounded most interesting, although other than accepting that some people are psychic or have occult powers, I was not prepared to believe anything more. On the appointed day I drove to a little one-storeyed bungalow in Byculla and rang the door bell. My first thought was that if there was so

great a spirit helping her, why did she have to live so modestly?

The name of this lady was Soona Erancee. She spelt her surname in the old style but it was the same as Irani, meaning of Iranian descent. She was referred to as Soonamai, the suffix '*mai*' meaning 'mother'. It was the way an elderly woman is often called in India indicating respect for her age. There was a young Irani girl, Tehmi, whom she had adopted, staying with her. Soonamai, a spinster, was then middle-aged.

Tehmi opened the door to me and led me to the prayer room where there were some pictures of prophets and saints. A brass railing separated the visitors to this room from the marble-topped table on which the *divo* was kept burning. I was asked to say my prayers till *mai* was ready to receive me. Then I would be called in. I prayed in my own amateur fashion for the things which then mattered most to me — good luck at the races, a good flow of cards at poker, rummy and *chemin* — and no shortage of money! With money, I was sure all my problems would fall into place. As I was told to ask for the things I wanted, I did so in my own materialistic way. Why be a hypocrite?

A little later, a side door opened and I was called in. Soonamai was a tall woman by Indian standards. She had deep, piercing eyes, a pleasant, welcoming smile. From the slight movement of her lips she seemed to be uttering some silent words of prayer. I was asked to sit on a chair opposite her, while Tehmi sat on a cane stool near by.

"Your mother often speaks about you", Soonamai said, still looking into my eyes. I was beginning to feel uncomfortable lest she could read my thoughts of doubt and disbelief. "I wanted to see you", she said. "I am glad you have come".

I thanked her for all the trouble she had taken but I felt it necessary to explain to her the conflict within me. I said, "You see, Miss Erancee, I am an educated person. I do believe in God in the abstract form but I think He is beyond a person like me who does not actively renounce the world.

I do believe what mother has told me but as I do not myself live a religious life, I feel I cannot acquire the belief which people such as you, have. However, if you can tell me something about my future, it would be most interesting to hear".

Soonamai's head was by now covered with her *sari* and her lips kept moving all the time she was listening to me. I learned later that before uttering the *kalam* itself this was the preliminary stage of prayer. She silently nodded her head once or twice. Then she spoke, "I am not a fortune teller. Usually the spirit who comes is reluctant to appear in the presence of anyone except Tehmi and myself. However, when I asked whether I could call you, Homai's son, I was told I could. So you are very fortunate". Homai was my mother's first name. Not aware at the time of the meaning of such a favour and treating the episode mainly as a fanciful diversion, I could do no more than be courteous to her and express my gratitude for the trouble she was taking on my behalf. Tehmi, who was now wearing a light coloured silk scarf on her head, had now started to apply a black cream, somewhat like mascara, on to the palm of her right hand. She sat with the blackened palm open, holding its wrist with the other hand. We chatted for a few moments more.

"He does not bestow such favours easily", Soonamai stressed once again. "So when he comes, you ask him whatever you want".

Who was he? Where was he? Why was he coming to me? How could he come from space because of this *kalam* which Soonamai seemed to be uttering. It was all very mysterious, but I was in no hurry to find out. I was willing to wait and see what would happen.

So we sat, the three of us, carrying on small talk for quite a while, when suddenly the younger woman, Tehmi raised the palm of her hand and bowed her head to it. "He has come", she said in a soft voice to Miss Erance. The latter immediately joined her hands in respect, and the *bethak* as it was called, began.

Thereafter, it was a three-way conversation. When I was asked to speak, I did. My questions were repeated by Miss Erancee as she alone was entitled to address the spirit whose image could be seen by Tehmi on her blackened palm. Tehmi merely relayed the answers she lip-read in her palm. There was no voice other than ours.

As this incident happened over thirty years ago, I remember very little of the exact questions I asked or the answers I received. But I do remember that after I had narrated my problems and the mental confusion I was experiencing at that time, the reply which came from the spirit was, "I will go and see. Then I shall tell you". Go where? I visualised a venerable and bearded sage, somewhat like the traditional concept of Father Time, turning over the pages of some book of destiny in some far-away archives to which only some select seers had access. It implied that a man's whole life was pre-determined and the scope for free will therein was extremely limited. It shattered the illusion I had carefully nurtured, that it was the individual who had the power to carve out his own destiny. Best to wait and see what answers he brought back, I thought.

For some twenty minutes, while he disappeared, we three were left chatting to one another. I asked Soonamai where he could be going to look into the future? Where would he find the answers to my questions? "These things, my dear, we do not know. Let us wait and see what he tells us", she replied. I remember I had especially asked that morning about the possibility of my marrying the girl whose name I mentioned in my questions. To that, when he returned to speak in the palm of Tehmi's hand, the answer was emphatic. "No, this attachment of yours will not materialise in marriage though you will always remain good friends. She will marry '*purjat*'¹ and so will you". I was disappointed with the answer and disinclined to believe it. But time did prove that prophesy to be correct.

¹ Out of the community.

Despite the interesting and positive replies to many of my questions, I remained in the main unimpressed with the *bethak*. Perhaps I was not yet ready for it for there was an abundance of disbelief in me, accentuated largely by a sense of realism acquired when abroad. The world of the supernatural I regarded as part of superstition, which was food only for illiterates. In such a frame of mind it was but natural that I viewed everything sceptically. I accepted it as possible that psychic persons had an occasional flash or a glimpse of the future, but nothing more. I still adhered to my belief that no one but myself could carve out my future.

The orient, and particularly India, abounds in psychic power. Soonamai's was perhaps another instance of it. I thought she was a clairvoyant, a religious-minded, well-meaning lady who had this talent which she used for the amelioration of the sufferings of those who came to her. I had little idea who the kind spirit was who answered my questions, or why he did me the favour of delving into my future.

When my mother asked me some days later how I had reacted to my first experience, I told her, "It was most interesting but I do not think I would rely on it. I would still prefer to act on my own judgment and make my own decisions". Confidence in myself was still as powerful as ever. "Anyway", my mother said, somewhat apologetically, "I thought it would interest you". There it rested for quite a while.

Soona Eranee moved some years later from her humble abode in the middle-class area of Byculla to a more sumptuous apartment on Marine Drive, nearer my mother's house. As a result, the meetings between them became more frequent. After evening prayers at home, my mother would often drive to Soonamai's to offer prayers there, to burn incense sticks and to bow her head in respect to the *divo*, the oil lamp at which scores who went to that house asked for help in solving their problems. Then Soonamai and mother would sit and talk. In time they became personal

friends. While I was aware that mother was in close and constant touch with this place of worship, as my own life was moving smoothly, I found little need to go to Soonamai myself. I continued, however, to hear from time to time about interesting happenings to a lot of people who went to her place. Listening to my mother talk, I acquired a liking for the supernatural, without wanting to get too closely entangled with it. The attitude I took was that this is a pastime for those who pursue a religious life, that it undoubtedly has a beneficial power, but that those who were very much of the earth and steeped in worldly materialism were not capable either of imbibing such power or of taking part in the ritual which preceded it.

Although I did not go to Soonamai's new home, except occasionally to drop my mother there, I became aware that this contact brought a great deal of peace of mind to my mother and I was therefore glad of her association with Soonamai. Sometimes when things got a bit rough for me, financially, politically, even emotionally, I would tell my particular problem to my mother, who would discuss it with Soonamai and I would get some kind of guidance or suggestion as to what I should do. But I stayed away, using mother as an intermediary. The answers I got from Soonamai helped me form my own judgment but I still maintained that the eventual decision on all material matters would always be mine. I alone could make my future, I believed. I was not prepared to budge from that position.

It was about the same time that I witnessed in our house another interesting phenomenon, absolutely baffling at the time, a more positive example of the supernatural than any I had ever seen. The person around whom this phenomenon centred was a very poor man, meek in behaviour and feeble of voice, he almost apologised for his presence. His name was Kamubhai. Kamu was his first name and *bhai*,

which means brother, was added as a friendly term by which Indians often call each other. He was brought to our house by an uncle.

I was in the midst of work in my newspaper office when early one afternoon I received a telephone call from my mother. Dropping her voice on the phone, so that she would not be overheard by those sitting near her, she informed me that a strange man had suddenly turned up with my uncle. It was said he had spiritual powers. If I were at all interested in witnessing how it happened, I should come over to see it for myself. She could not guarantee anything, not having witnessed the phenomenon herself. I made my excuses to my editor, got into my car and drove over.

When I arrived, the family, as also my uncle, were sitting in an inner room of my father's flat. It was a light room with wide verandahs open to the fresh air. I was introduced to Kamubhai. He called me by my first name immediately, which though strange, was understandable because that was how I had been referred to by my parents. There was nothing impressive about him. He spoke in a weak, reedy voice, with a slight lilt to it. He was not educated but he was an extremely gentle person. He was the essence of humility. He wore a white cotton pyjama which in India is known as a *lega*, with a cream silk shirt, which was not tucked in. Over it he wore a very loose cotton coat of a salt and pepper fleck, an old garment frayed at the collar. The silk shirt was given to him by a rich textile mill-owner. In fact whatever he had was given to him as a gift. He wore what people gave him to wear. His hair was close-cropped, a mixture of grey and white and although he did not wear a beard, he was also not clean shaven. When I arrived, Kamubhai was sitting in an old style wood-and-cane chair which had been in our family for some fifty years. He had removed his slippers, pulled up his legs and was sitting crosslegged on this chair, a simple little fellow, most innocuous, who spoke in rather a high-pitched voice. He took a great deal of interest in everything in our house and he showed almost childish surprise at the most ordinary

items of information we gave him. Everything had to be simplified for him to understand. His questions about us were simple too. Directed mainly to my parents, he wanted to know how many children they had, what was the age difference between each of us, what we the children were now doing. There were references to colleges and education. In his own way, he referred to my being 'educated in foreign'. Whether my uncle had discussed me with him in the course of conversation or whether this was a manifestation of psychic knowledge I never found out, but from several little remarks about one or the other of us, we did notice that he had more knowledge than a stranger should have. But he never said so much that he could be asked, "How did you know that?". Strangely he was not aware of the better known facts about me, namely that I worked on a newspaper and that I had already written books. Such information appeared to make a tremendous impression on him. "You write books!" he exclaimed, shaking his head in the Indian style of appreciation. Everything seemed to impress him, which indicated the environment of simplicity in which he had been brought up. He was absolutely without malice, without envy of what others possessed; he was not shy or embarrassed about his own frugal existence. He seemed anxious to be helpful to others by solving their difficulties, even by helping them acquire wealth, a commodity he least possessed. I found it difficult to understand how he could solve a man's financial difficulties, when he seemed to have so little material wealth himself. I also found it difficult to believe that any spiritual power could exude from someone so simple as he.

There was an occasional reference to some well to do business people who had been looking after him when his health was bad. At that time he had moved to their affluent residence on Bombay's Malabar Hill, but Kamu normally lived with his wife, Minni *amma*,¹ in a one room tenement called a *kholi*, in a side lane of Kamathipura, a poor, even

¹ 'Minni' is the personal name; '*amma*' means mother.

dubious, district of Bombay, littered with whore shops, pimps and prostitutes, tawdry establishments of third-rate singing girls, cheap restaurants, shady medical practitioners, illegal gambling clubs and dens for smoking *charas* and *hashish*, the drugs easily available in India. It was hardly a locality to be associated with a holy man.

"How can a man like you stay in Kamathipura?" I asked him. "It has a bad reputation". That was putting it mildly.

"What have I got to do with the locality?" he calmly replied, reiterating my own theory that dirt does not touch all of us. It is only those who are afraid and unsure of themselves who absorb the surrounding dirt or get absorbed by it. But Kamu added something more to his reply which illustrated the humility which was inherent in him or which he had acquired through years of prayer. He said, "And why do I need to have a reputation?" There was no answer to that. He clarified later, "I stay where I am told to stay".

"Told by whom?" I was quick to ask.

"Baba, of course".

Now this word "*Baba*" needs to be explained. It is Arabic and Urdu for father. In another Indian language, Gujarati, the word for father is *bawa*. Both words mean the same thing in their respective languages, but when used by two different individuals the same word does not necessarily refer to the same person. It refers to the spiritual force which guides a particular individual.

In Kamubhai's case, I had learned that he was a disciple of Sai Baba whose shrine is at Shirdi near Nasik in Maharashtra. Again, Sai Baba at that time was only a name I had heard for the first time. Strangely this is how knowledge of all these saints and holy men of India is acquired. It is not recorded or codified anywhere. It is part legend, part folk-lore passed down by word of mouth. A few stray manuscripts do exist about some of the saints of Islam, but often they exist in such an archaic form that they are difficult for a layman to understand.

In time when I saw pictures of Sai Baba being sold at

street corners and on the dash-boards of taxis exhibited by the drivers to improve their livelihood, I began to recognise the saint from Shirdi. I also noticed the beginning of an attempt on Kamubhai's part not only to imbibe and follow his *guru's*¹ teachings but also to resemble him in appearance. When Kamu acquired spiritual power himself the resemblance between them became even more noticeable. As judged from Sai Baba's pictures, the distinctive characteristics of the saint from Shirdi were his three or four days' growth of beard, as distinct from a properly cultivated beard and he always had a white cloth or handkerchief tied around his forehead like a bandage. What the exact significance of this headgear was, I never found out. Also in his pictures, Sai Baba sat in a characteristic pose with the heel of one leg resting on the knee of the other. Sai Baba was the pattern on which Kamu was trying to mould himself. So when Kamu referred to '*baba*', his reference was to Sai Baba of Shirdi, a spiritual force of recent years with an enormous cosmopolitan following. I speak only of what I have heard and what I have seen. It is possible that there exist others who have inherited spiritual power from the same source, but I am unfamiliar with them.

Kamu went on to explain, "*Baba* sends everything — food, clothes for me and Minni *amma*, money for the rent of our room, everything we have he gives to us". Food and clothes either came accidentally from some well-to-do persons or by design at Sai Baba's instance.

But from where did the money come for the rent of his *kholi*? Being curious, I asked Kamubhai, apologising for my personal question.

"No need for you to apologise", Kamubhai said quite simply, "It is like this: Every Saturday my rent becomes due. So on Friday mornings, when I get up, *Baba* gives me a 'figure' to play and I play it. I put one rupee and four annas² on it and by the evening the figure has come up.

¹ Spiritual teacher
to Rs. 1.25 paise.

² Pre-decimal currency, now equivalent

Next morning I collect my winnings, pay the rent to the bill collector when he comes around and I have a little money left for small purchases such as Minni *amma's* washing soap or my *bidis*'. These were Indian, hand-rolled crudely made, leaf cigarettes, the cheapest variety in smokes. With this he pulled out a *bidi* from his coat pocket, asked my mother if he could smoke it. Father immediately offered him a cigarette from his case but Kamu politely declined, preferring his own *bidi*.

As easy as that! Back 'a figure' every Friday which never failed to turn up by the same evening, netting for the man who backed it 8 to 1. From my languid pose on the *chaise-longue* on which I was reclining, I sat up. My parents could not have realised the significance of what Kamu was saying, much less my younger sister and brother, but in fact the explanation given so innocently by one who was by repute a holy man, was incredible. The 'figure' referred to was the pivotal point of the biggest, most illegal daily gamble in Bombay city. It was, at that time, the last digit of the cents in the closing price on the New York cotton exchange. On this figure turned, as if in an enormous roulette game, a gamble which went daily into millions of rupees. Well-placed and well-to-do *sethias*¹ as well as the humblest-paid employees and domestic servants gambled on it every day, except Sundays and holidays when the New York cotton exchange would be closed.

There was an 'opening' and a 'closing' figure, in both cases it being the last cent digit on which the gamble turned. The main gamble each day was on the 'closing' last digit, at the odds of 8 to 1. The whole business was totally illegal, but it was conducted on such a large scale that it could only have been done with the active connivance of the police. With that aspect we are not concerned. It was the thought that this little man was given a figure each week which came up with unfailing regularity and yet he used this tremendous power only to pay the rent of his modest one-

¹ Term for the well-placed orthodox old-fashioned Indian businessmen; generally meaning 'the haves'.

room tenement in one of the lowliest localities of Bombay. It was the sort of power which could make a millionaire out of a pauper in the course of a week. Dynamite, I thought, but such power would not be put in the hands of persons other than someone like Kamu who was trained to use it only for the limited purpose for which it was given.

While we talked to Kamu, he was happily tugging away at his dry tobacco-leafed *bidi*, which produced a rank, acrid smell in the room. He smoked it as the Indian villagers do, without touching the *bidi* to his lips, holding it with his hands cupped together. His manner, his talk, his appearance were no different from that of a very ordinary man whose humble presence one would not notice in a crowded street.

Soon there was a noticeable lull in the conversation and then complete silence fell on the family scene in the room. All eyes turned towards Kamubhai for there was a distinct change in the look of his eyes. He had a fixed, glazed look. He appeared to be swallowing something and at that time he had two little hiccups in quick succession which he was trying to suppress. My uncle made a sign to my mother to indicate that the moment we were waiting for was about to come.

So it did, a few moments later. Between the forefinger of his left hand and his thumb, he crushed his burning *bidi* and let it drop slowly on the floor. He sat up; it was no more the puny little fellow my uncle had brought in with him. He looked around to see who was sitting around him. We in turn, emerged from our relaxed poses, awaiting his next move. There was a pin-drop silence in that room. Then in a voice, whose power, tone and texture were so different from the meek voice of Kamu, the spirit that had taken possession of Kamu's limp body, broke out into words of Arabic prayer, the meaning of which except for the one word, *Allah*, I did not understand. When I first heard it, it sent a chill down my spine.

We were aware that he was praying in our house and we all sat stiffly to attention with our heads bowed. My

mother to show respect covered her head with the edge of the *sari*. Yet no one knew what precise prayer he had uttered. The presumption was that the spirit who had taken charge of Kamu was his own *guru*, Sai Baba, but no picture of this saint of Shirdi which I have subsequently seen ever gave any idea of the power which we witnessed radiating from the electrified Kamu that afternoon.

Having concluded reciting his prayers, he called out to my father. "Framji", he said, using my father's first name, to which my father quickly answered "*Ha, Ji*", a respectful way of saying "Yes, sir". "What are you worrying over?", the voice boomed through the room chiding my father for his lack of confidence in himself. The position at the time was that my father had retired from government service and was feeling lonely and uncomfortable in his retirement. Government rules required a man to retire at a certain age.

"Come here", the voice said. Father got up from his chair beside his writing table and moved towards the man who to us was still Kamubhai.

"Sit here", the voice said. He pointed to his thigh.

Father was a well-made, heavy-boned man, about five feet nine in height and then some two hundred pounds in weight. For him to sit on the lap or the thigh of Kamubhai was to crush him. It would surely have fractured a bone. Father naturally hesitated. "Sit down", the powerful voice insistently said by way of a command; "What are you afraid of?"

"*Ha, ji*", my father meekly replied and did as he was told. Father told us later that he could not believe how powerful were the hands that gripped his shoulders, while uttering more words of prayer. Slowly father's both arms were massaged from the shoulder down to the fingers while the prayer was continuously uttered. The meaning of this we understood much later for father had a fear of paralysis which my grandfather had and this was the part of father's body over which the voice was uttering its blessings. Then he put his hand over father's head and blessed him, adding with a pat on his back, "Go, have no fear. Nothing will

happen to you". Father understood the meaning of those words long before we did; he knew the fear in his mind.

My mother he blessed by holding both her hands within his and saying a prayer. She merely bowed her head as she stood in front of him. To her, he said, "You already say prayers yourself and God listens to them. I don't need to say any more for you".

My turn came next, for I was my parents' eldest child, the first of the three. He called me by my pet name, by which I was known in my family, not by my more formal name as I had expected he would.

"What are you doing with that thing in your pocket?", he suddenly asked me.

"What thing?", I asked, having no idea what he was speaking about. He moved his hand to his back, indicating that he was referring to my hip pocket in which I kept my wallet. It still conveyed nothing to me. I looked puzzled. "That little charm you keep so safely as if it will make any difference", he said.

Then I realised what he meant but the amazing thing was that only three people in the world knew about it — one, the Hindu priest who performed a *puja* before giving it to me; two, a Parsi friend who brought this priest over when nothing seemed to be going right and the third person was myself. It was such a personal matter, I was even embarrassed discussing it with anyone. From the moment I had got it, no one had seen it; it had gone straight into my wallet and out of my mind. He had referred to it only to give me a glimpse of his power of perception. My hand automatically went to my hip pocket and I asked, "You don't want me to keep it?"

"It doesn't matter", he replied. "You can keep it. It can do no harm".

Then he called me towards him. He took my right hand in his left and pressed it against his heart. With his right hand, he went all over my head and both my shoulders praying all the while in a muted voice. Then he took my right hand in both his hands and pressed the muscle in the

arc of my thumb and the forefinger, quite hard till it almost hurt. What could that mean, I wondered. It took time to work it out, but soon it became clear that in as much as I was a writer, he was giving me power for the hand that writes.

That first day at our house, he blessed each of us, spoke to us in turn, at the end of which the spirit said, "Now it is time for *namaz*¹ and I must take your leave", and once again uttering words of Arabic prayer his spirit seemed to waft out of our presence, leaving on the same chair, a crumpled half-exhausted Kamubhai trying to return to consciousness again.

As my uncle had suggested, Kamubhai was immediately given a hot cup of tea and he revived. He was back again, the meek little man with the frail voice. We had also been told that Kamubhai when he revived, would know nothing of what had happened. It was difficult for us who had witnessed a supernatural phenomenon to return to normal conversation. Soon, however, Kamubhai himself had to return home. He asked what was the number of the bus he should take! A spirit going home by bus! By now, I was getting interested, a little involved but certainly very confused.

¹ Prayer

11

No thai thai in Chungking

BETWEEN 1938 when I returned from England and 1942, the pattern of my luck showed a slow, imperceptible decline. It was a pattern woven out of upward curves closely followed by deep downs indicative of depths of depression. If this pattern could have been reduced to a chart it would have resembled a cardiogram after a bad heart attack, with shallow heart-beats struggling to register themselves above the line and deep, inverted q's indicating that the condition of the patient was serious. It was also a period marked with much frustration. Every ounce of recognition had to be squeezed out like toothpaste from a near-finished tube. Matters came to a head when Murphy, the little manager of Thackers bookshop asked me to write a publisher's blurb for my own book. "No one will know who has written it and you can do it so much better than anyone else".

"But Murphy", I said, "an author does not write his own blurb. It is the publisher who puts him across on the dust-jacket".

"After the war, we will get a man to do all that. Right now we are selling. I am having to print new editions of almost all your books. You can start a new book right away and we will print it as you write. So what does it matter who writes the blurb?"

It had never happened to anyone I knew, that a publisher prints as the author writes. I looked disbelievingly at Murphy. "Yes", he said, convincing me that he meant

what he said. "You write and I will print".

Over that week-end I sat down and on my portable thumped out the first chapter of a new novel with a local setting. I called it *There Lay The City* because as one looked at the bay and the curve of Marine Drive in Bombay from the height of Malabar Hill with the closely packed city on the left, the title of a novel, around Judy, a non-existent Anglo-Indian girl, suggested itself.

The young Anglo-Indian girl in India at that time was a most desirable piece of womanhood. Girls of other Indian communities seemed too glued to the ideas of security, dinned into them by environment and family and the only relationship possible with them was matrimony. The fact that between then and now, the Indian girl from orthodox families has caught up with the rest and is even ahead at some points is part of the acceleration resulting from the over-enthusiasm of developing countries.

A few days later, I called at Thackers and put two chapters on Murphy's table, saying, "A new novel, already begun".

Murphy looked at the neatly typed pages and read out the title page. Then without another word, he picked up the telephone as he had done before and asked for his printer to come around. For the next few moments, he kept looking admiringly at the same page, repeating to himself the title of the book and the name of the author. "Sounds good", he said. "A novel again? How many pages will it be?" At that time the trend was for big-size books with the best-selling *Gone With The Wind* setting the pace for assured success. "I am trying to make it big", I said. "But let's see how long I last out".

By now the printer had come to Murphy's table in his working outfit, a singlet and a pair of khaki shorts, covered with grease and printer's ink. "*Saheb's* new book", Murphy said, handing over the new manuscript. "Start tomorrow?"

The printer danced his head with much approval. Any author would have been flattered by this silent approval of the printer except that I happened to know that my printer

could not read a word of English.

"Start tomorrow?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, why waste time? I have already got enquiries from booksellers for your next book". He added by way of an afterthought, "There is nothing doubtful in the book?"

"No", I said reassuringly, "but you are the publisher. Don't you want to read the manuscript before you start publication?"

"What's the point? If you say it is alright, it is alright with me. Besides, I know that if my machines are kept working for you, you will write faster".

So began the simultaneous writing and printing of my second novel, which was my sixth or seventh book. As I finished each chapter and went over to Thackers to deliver it, Murphy kept telling me he was extremely busy. "Doing what?" I asked him one day.

"Booking orders for your book", he replied.

So the days rolled on and the characters in *There Lay The City* began to emerge slowly from its pages. Bearing in mind that I intended to write a novel larger in size than usual, and the setting of the book was in a city I knew so well, the movement of the characters was kept slow, the romance soft paced and passions kept well under control. An air of reality permeated the pages of this manuscript which went straight from the author to the flat bed of the printing machine. Once a week the printer would ring me up to ask how many pages of the manuscript he should expect from me. He had to plan the economical use of his composing and printing machines. He gave me little time to relax, as also Judy, for once she was created she became attractive enough for me to want to get closer to her in the next chapter. An intimate relationship was developing between two sympathetic bodies despite the yawning gap in their respective minds.

Meanwhile the war was going badly for the Allies and those in India who felt they had a score to settle were inwardly happy at the drubbing the British were receiving at the hands of Hitler. Nazi propaganda, especially the exaggerated tales of successes, went down well in India. It seemed easier to hail the Germans as victors from afar than to aid the allies in a losing battle. The fact that, if such an estimate of the eventual result of the war were to have proved correct, we would have moved from the colonialism under which we smarted to abject slavery under a fascist dictatorship, was overlooked. The world has always been full of those anxious to jump on the bandwagon of someone else's victory. Often they have hastened defeat by anticipating it. Those who have held out at such moments of crisis because of personal faith, have found themselves shrinking in numbers, pushed aside by those who were chasing success, mocked at and dubbed as stooges. Such a stage came quite often during the war when it became very difficult to cling to one's lone belief in the power of God in his heaven, when the enemy was unquestionably proving triumphant on earth. Yet despite the odds, some still stuck to their faith.

Nearer home, in the China-Burma-India theatre of war, we were less happy when the Japanese scored a victory for then the danger was coming nearer to our homeland. It was, however, the Chinese who bore the main brunt of the Japanese attack and there was very little understanding in India of how that war in the far east was progressing.

My personal position at that time was peculiar. I was on the staff of a paper strongly critical of the British regime. As such I could not be trusted by a government which was British dominated. The fact that I ignored and opposed the insular directives of the Congress party which had resolved not to co-operate with the war effort, did not make me any more reliable. I was in fact neither fish nor fowl, and at lower levels of the administration, no one could understand me. Having just turned thirty, I began to feel this frustration, unable to make even the smallest contribution to one

of the biggest moments of history.

It was at that time that I accidentally met a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, directly in charge of the department of Information and Broadcasting. He was Sir Frederick Puckle. A few days after that meeting, there arrived in India the great Marshal of China, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek. Chiang was on a military and political mission to India, a guest of the Viceroy, Lord Irwin. The Generalissimo's presence in India, as also that of his extremely attractive wife, Mei-ling Soong Chiang, appeared to attract our articulate nationalists. Jawaharlal Nehru was absolutely charmed by this visiting couple, and as some believed, more by the beauty of the exquisite Mei-ling than by the sterling qualities of "our valiant neighbour".¹

Time magazine produced one of its more brilliant reportages on the Generalissimo's arrival in India. Headed the "BATTLE OF ASIA: Pomp and the Circumstances", the article said:

~~Even~~ the soft Indian morning seemed a bright blue pennant, peculiarly British. Sunlight splashed on the copper dome of the Viceroy's palace, and down Kings Way the War Memorial Arch, casting precise shadows, was a reminder of past victories. There was nothing to suggest desperation in the brightly polished Rolls-Royce with a plucky little Union Jack whipping from the radiator cap. The long line of troops stood rigid, a starched khaki pride.

Only Sir Edward Elgar could have put this scene to music. Only Kipling could have rhymed it. It was the glory of the British Empire summarized. And yet this was the scene — More than Singapore, more than the wrangling House of Commons, more than the smoke-choked, German-defiled Strait of Dover — that said to the world: the British Empire, as an idea, is on its last gallant march, from which it may not come home.

For in that Rolls-Royce, reviewing those troops, owning

¹ Nehru's phrase.

that bright blue morning, was a man who, by the old standards, was just a 'native', but, by the new, was one of the half-dozen most important men in the world — Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek of China. By his side was his beautiful wife, Mei-ling Soong Chiang. .¹

Overnight, we who hitherto knew very little about Chiang Kai-shek, began to realise, after Nehru had arranged a press conference for the Generalissimo, that for four long years he had been the spearhead of Chinese resistance against the Japanese. There was also a realisation in some of us that he had not come to India merely to experience the sensation of walking on Lord Irwin's red carpet.

As India had reacted so well to Chiang's visit, it occurred to me that it would be the ideal time for an Indian newspaper man to go over to see his country so that there could be an awareness in India of the reality of war, which was the main objective with which the Generalissimo had come to India. The fact that China was an Asian country made its fight somewhat different from that of the allies in Europe, to aid whom our political leaders had so many reservations.

I sat up late at night to draft a letter to Sir Frederick to put this idea across. Only a person in his position could take a quick decision and to my pleasant surprise he agreed to allow me to go to China as a correspondent. He went further: he suggested that I should broadcast from Chungking to India every day, during the proposed month of my assignment, and he asked his department to make the necessary arrangements.

When I went up to Delhi to finalise the details of my trip and also to thank Sir Frederick for the personal interest he had taken, I found him sitting on the spacious lawns of his bungalow and his first words to me were: "Everyone thinks I am mad, sponsoring your trip to Chungking, but I am determined to win this war and I believe this is one step in that direction. That is why I am anxious that you should go".

¹ Reprinted by permission from TIME, The Weekly Newsmagazine; (c) Time Inc.

When I returned from Delhi, there were several frantic messages awaiting me. The printer from Thackers had telephoned to say he had no copy matter to compose. Mr. Murphy had also made several anxious calls about the date of my return from Delhi. I thought it best to go over to the bookshop and discuss the situation arising out of my proposed trip to China.

"Something big has happened", I told Murphy. "I am going to China".

"China! Why do you want to go to China? There's fighting going on over there". I told him in brief what had happened in Delhi during the last few days and how delighted I was to get this opportunity.

"Well, I am glad", Murphy said. "But what about the novel? Everything you've written is already printed. Some pages have been collated and even stitched".

"Can't I finish it on my return?" I asked.

"I've got orders booked already. When you come back you can write another book — on China, but let's get this novel finished and sold".

I had just over two weeks in hand before my travel papers came through and for arrangements to be finalised with Radio Chungking. I told Murphy I would see what could be done in that time. "Yes", Murphy said with considerable relief. "You go home, think it over and finish the book". It was a difficult problem I had set myself. My mind was on Chungking and the war; it was difficult to bring it back to romancing with my little Anglo-Indian girl. The plot I had woven around her was going to be slow moving and deep set. I had thought up a sex involvement from which it was going to be difficult to extricate myself. But now there was no time to get so deeply involved. I sat up through half that first night reading the pages which were already printed and thinking out what I could do with the characters floating in mid-novel. In the next few days, I typed away incessantly. In two or three chapters I finished the book but in the process I had to finish off most of the characters also. There lay the city and there also lay a

few dead corpses. The book ended on a sad, limp note which a lot of its readers found most touching. But I knew it was just literary murder. I handed over the remaining pages of the manuscript to Murphy a day before I was due to leave.

I travelled by train to Calcutta, where I awaited an important communication, a letter of introduction to the Chiang Kai-sheks which I had requested Mr. Nehru to give me. I felt that an introduction from the glamorous Nehru would make a big difference to me in Chungking. Nehru responded generously on this occasion. He was an amazing person, at times so unpredictably kind and helpful. He sent me a telegram to say that he was requesting the Chinese Consul General in Calcutta, Dr. Pao, to get me the contacts I needed on my Chungking trip.

Pao was a very cultured Chinese, reflecting in his attitude the rich philosophy to be found in the pages of Lin Yutang's book: *The Importance of Living*. He exuded self-confidence and power. He was unafraid of being bitterly caustic when the situation demanded it. Once, when addressing the Rotary Club at Calcutta he was asked which of two cultures, Japanese or Chinese, was the more ancient. Pao replied with great calm: "I have not read much about Japanese culture so I cannot say for sure, but I have been reading the history of China and the first time I came across a reference to Japan was in Volume 26".

The day before I was due to leave, he gave me a sealed envelope, saying, "I have put all my letters of introduction into this envelope addressed to our Foreign Office. I have sealed it".

"To whom do I give the envelope when I get to Chungking?", I naively asked.

"You don't", Dr. Pao replied. "You open it yourself and throw away the envelope. The letters inside are for

you". This short-cut through the Indian and Chinese censors was an excellent idea but what if someone saw me rip up an envelope addressed to the Kuomintang Foreign Office? Noticing my discomfiture, Dr. Pao added, "Don't worry. With Pandit Nehru's introduction, you will be an honoured guest in our country". I nodded in gratitude, collected my valuable envelope and left.

The next afternoon before embarking on the C.N.A.C., plane to Chungking, we were screened by customs and security on the ground floor of the Great Eastern hotel. The customs inspector was quite innocuous but the man who was handling security, after seeing from my passport that my occupation was that of a journalist, decided that more than the usual precautions were necessary.

"Journalist", he said. As he was Calcutta based, he had never heard of me. "Which paper?" he asked. As I answered his question, he said: "But that's anti-British?" At that time most papers in India were bitterly critical of the government. "Then how do they let you go?"

"You ask them", I replied.

He soon realised I was the impertinent type but he also wanted me to know he had authority and he intended to use it.

"Open up your case again", he said, pointing to my collapsible Revelation suitcase. I did as I was told and he started to feel around my carefully packed clothes. "What's this?" he asked, pulling out Dr. Pao's sealed envelope. At this point, the customs inspector looked over his shoulder to join in a careful search for anything subversive. "It is as you see a packet addressed to the Chinese Foreign Office", I replied.

"Who gave it to you?" he snapped.

The customs inspector was more circumspect. He pointed to the seal of the Chinese Consulate-General and in an audible whisper, said, "Diplomatic". The security man realised he could not open the packet but he was not happy that I should be carrying it. He asked what authority I had to carry it.

"Who says I need authority?" I replied, getting a little impatient with this obnoxious fellow. "I will have to report you for asking these bloody impertinent questions", I said.

"I am security", he said, "I have to ask".

At this stage, I produced from my pocket the additional letter of identification I carried from Sir Frederick Puckle for just such a situation as this. I handed it over to the security officer to read. His eye fell on the red crest of the Government of India on the back of the envelope. Carefully he pulled out the letter from inside it and another crest caught his eye. Then the words, "Viceroy's Executive Council" printed in red. He did not read any more.

"Sorry sir", he said, "I was only trying to do my duty". But he did not read the note. He was paralysed at the sight of the embossed red crests. "I will pack your bag for you, sir", he said and as he did so, he kept saying to the customs inspector, "Viceroy's Executive Council! That's very high, man". After that I had no trouble at all. I boarded the airline bus, was helped out when I arrived at Dum-Dum airport, was sirred and saluted, shepherded into the plane in a front row seat. It was a DC-3, then the latest thing in civil aviation. The pilot who was an American, revved his engines and soon we were airborne.

Our first stop was Lashio, a four-hour hop. It was a smooth run; the pilot told me we had been lucky, "usually, the weather here is bumpy". As we glided into Lashio, it was dusk. "The place has been plastered", the pilot commented. I could see from the air the heavy scars of Japanese bombing. The sky was an angry crimson; the earth was red. Dark green hills surrounded us.

We were in Burma now as I could see from the shape of the eyes of those who worked on the ground, pronounced cheek bones, shiny jet black hair, absolutely straight. Complexions were olive and smooth.

Some new passengers got into the plane at Lashio. They were mainly Chinese women and children. We took off for Kunming. Soon it became dark and the streaks of lightning flashing across the sky lit up the sleepy faces inside the

plane. Two and a half hours later we landed at Kunming airport where I got down to smoke a cigarette.

I had set foot in China. The day was April 14, 1942, coincidentally my thirty-first birthday. What a way to spend it! I had eaten nothing all day except a cheese sandwich. But a birthday was an insignificant detail when a war was going on. At Kunming airport some young American lads came up to speak to me, most of whom could have fitted into any movie cast. But the shooting they were doing in Burma was not of the Hollywood kind, for this was the American Volunteer Group under Chennault.

We were soon back in the air, flying in the dark. Chungking was another two and a half hours away. When we landed there, it was midnight in Bombay by one wrist-watch and one-thirty in the morning, Chungking time, by the other. We landed on a sandbank in a river bed. Someone from the British press attache's office had come to meet me. This was fortunate otherwise I would have had to sleep the night on the floor of the customs shed at the airport.

From the river bed there were four hundred and eighty steps to climb before arriving at street level. I climbed a few, then I thought it wiser to be carried up in a chair. I was driven to a house in which the boys of the British Embassy lived. I had to share a room with a bloke who was already fast asleep and whom I was told not to disturb. I was famished. The cheese sandwich on the plane was not enough. When I was asked what I would like to eat, I tried to be easy and replied, "Just a little bread and butter and some cheese will do".

My host laughed. "Butter!" he said. "We haven't seen it here for quite some time. And cheese does not exist". I realised I would have to start thinking in different terms from now on. I fed that night on bread and home-made cherry jam. I drank water to quench my thirst. Soon I tucked myself into bed, laying my tired limbs on the very thin straw mattress which separated me from a hard wooden plank. I slept like a log till the next morning when I awoke to the sound of a trumpet and weird street cries of Chinese.

peddlers hawking their wares. Dressed, no bath of course. I was escorted to the press hostel, a group of bamboo and straw *bashas*,¹ where the foreign newspapermen were housed. I was lucky to get accommodation here, for a room had fallen vacant just that morning.

A very pleasant group of journalists lived here, sharing expenses. The doyen of the press corps was Colin Macdonald of the *London Times*. Based on Macdonald, his Chinese name became Ma which meant 'horse'. Later when an Australian correspondent with the same surname, Roderick Macdonald, joined the press corps, he also had to be called Ma. To distinguish the two, Macdonald senior was elevated to La Ma, meaning 'old horse'.

Roderick had blond hair and wore a moustache. He was full of fun during the month I knew him in Chungking. I next saw his name on a cross at the foot of Monte Cassino in Italy. Others at the Chungking press hostel were Spencer Moosa of the Associated Press with Nina, his Russian wife, Tommy Chao of Reuters with his Chinese wife, James Stewart of *Time & Life*, Harrison Forman of the *New York Times*, Pepper Martin of United Press and Douglas Wilkie another Australian correspondent.

Such was the make-up of our press hostel where typewriters clicked all hours of the night. We went to bed when we finished our work; we got up in the morning when we had to. Only meal time had to be strictly observed. Our lunch was of Chinese chow, dinner was a 'foreign' meal, which meant a steak. All through the day and with each meal, we drank unsweetened Chinese tea, sometimes with bits of chrysanthemum flowers floating on top of the cup, but tea there was to drink all through the day.

For the first meal or two I got very little to eat. This was my fault. I insisted on using chop sticks and until I got used to them, I was slow in picking up the food in my bowl. By the time I had finished one helping, the dishes on the table would be emptied.

¹ Huts

I was regarded as a bird of good omen in Chungking for it was on the day I set foot in China that Tokyo was for the first time bombed by the allies. Four years of ruthless bombing, Chungking had withstood. The press hostel in which I had come to live had been razed to the ground more than once. The present row of string and bamboo huts was by no means the first edition. That was why the furniture inside our rooms looked so new. 'Furniture' was perhaps too elaborate a word for the raw wood pieces which were a bed, a writing table and chair and a cupboard which would not close due to the warping of the wood.

The air raids on Chungking had been really savage. James Stewart told me that often, as he would sit in the dug-out all keyed up, a bundle of frazzled nerves because the whole place would rock and blast with bombs which fell near-by, the Chinese would continue to sleep in the open, unconcerned about the raid which was on. Bombing was nothing unusual to the Chinese; it had become part of normal life. And now, for the first time, Tokyo had been bombed. There was much rejoicing in Chungking on that day.

Because prices were prohibitive in Chungking, particularly of everything which came from abroad, one could not ask another correspondent even for an aspirin tablet; one was obliged to buy one's own or endure the headache. At the end of a week of Chinese chow, a diet to which I was unaccustomed, and perhaps because the bean sprouts and bamboo shoots did not agree with me, I developed a malady which could not be too openly discussed, constipation. Some sort of a laxative was called for but as medicines could not be borrowed, I realised I would have to solve this problem myself. The Chinese must also suffer sometimes from this complaint, I realised, so that there was bound to be a local cure. That morning, after breakfast I went out to look for a drug store.

This was not difficult. Not far from the press hostel I saw the signboard of *China Drug Store* sprawled across the frontage of a building on the Liang Lu-kuo. As I entered it a bell rang as in the small shops of provincial

England, informing the shopkeeper that a customer had arrived. I waited for only a moment when from behind a curtain, a Chinese emerged wearing the white coat of a chemist. His hands clasped in the manner of an Anglican clergyman, he bowed and uttered some words in Chinese, which I assumed were of greeting.

"Good morning", I said and he nodded. "You speak English?" I asked. His hands clasped he produced a long sentence in reply which sounded like, "Spiks spiks thai-thai cho tong-long thai".

Goodness, I thought, that's going to be difficult especially when one's urgent need was a medical preparation expected to produce a certain instant clinical effect. Perhaps being a chemist he would more easily recognise some proprietary brands. "Have you any Eno's? You know, fruit salt", I asked.

"Nose nose, thai-thai cho tong-long thai", came the answer. Only this time he seemed to speak with greater clarity than before. As he did not move away from me to fetch anything, I gathered it must be out of stock.

I asked for another well-known laxative. "Have you any Cascara?"

"Cuss cuss, thai cho tong thai-thai". I gathered he did not have that either.

I was getting a little desperate by now. "Have you no kind of laxative?"

"Lux? Lux? No lux. Thai-thai tho-ling thai", he replied most politely, his hands still clasped parson-style.

Not wishing to give up, I switched over from speech to dumb charade. I clenched the fist of my right hand and clasped it close to the pit of my stomach. I then screwed up my eyes and made noises indicating a struggle. "Ah!", he said separating his hands. My need had at last registered with him and he produced a flood of Chinese words, "Ah!" he said once again, pointing, a finger heavenwards, "thai thai thai". I noticed there were no "ling-longs" in his answer this time from which I gathered the required medicine was identified and available.

He whisked up to the mezzanine floor of his drug shop. I could see him from downstairs, climbing a short ladder and producing a couple of bottles from the back of a shelf, as if a laxative were only for under-the-counter sale. Then he rushed down and proceeded to extract some pills from one bottle and place them on a piece of white paper. The pills were fawn coloured, not well finished and appeared to be of indigenous manufacture. The label on that bottle was handwritten in Chinese. On the other, which was a thin, long glass phial, I noticed a name printed in English. This must be more reliable, I thought to myself.

He understood my preference. "Ah tho, thai tho", he said, his eyes emphasising how effective this imported brand was and as I guessed, also more expensive.

"How much?" I asked. This question he somehow understood quite easily. He put two tablets on the table and with his hands he held up eight fingers.

"Eight dollars! For two pills!" That was more than a pound sterling. The price was shattering, but this was an essential item of expenditure which could not be avoided. I continued to express my shock in the hope that the price may fall. "Eight dollars! Wicked", I reiterated.

"Ah! Wick wick thai tho thing-ling thai-thai", he said from which I gathered that the goods he was selling me were worth their high price. They would produce excellent results, he assured me with a wink of his eye, adding "Ah zo!"

"Okay. I buy two", I said, holding up two fingers.

He pulled out two tablets of the imported kind, took them away to wrap up in a piece of brown paper, leaving the rest of the phial with me to look at. He trusted me, despite the high cost of the pills, four Chinese dollars each.

"Eight Chinese dollars to relieve constipation!", I murmured to myself. "Bloody expensive!" As these thoughts flashed across my mind, I casually picked up the glass phial to read the tiny printing on it. The pills were 'Made in France', I discovered. In the minute print was given the dosage and the chemical contents of each pill.

in French. There was one important last line printed in block caps. I twirled the phial carefully round to decipher it and it read: APHRODISIAC.

"Who the hell wants an aphrodisiac!" I said quite audibly. In Chungking it was declared a penal offence for a man to sleep with a woman who was not his wife. Promiscuous cohabitation was banned by Kuomintang law. As I saw the chemist coming towards me with the two pills wrapped in paper, I said, "No, John, no. Aphrodisiac, no".

He stood gaping at me. He was most distressed. In a subdued voice he said, "No thai thai?"

"No", I said, whatever that meant. Then I went through my charade actions all over again, except that instead of remaining standing with the fist clenched close to my stomach, I squatted down on bent knees, oriental style! I also uttered the first Chinese word I had learned during my short stay, '*mafung*'. It was coarse slang for lavatory, which the press boys translated with the appropriate Americanism, 'shit-house'.

The chemist was now lukewarm towards me. His enthusiasm to serve me noticeably waned. He said nothing to me any more. He merely fetched a large bottle from the front of another shelf not so high up, showed me the Chinese lettering on the label which he read out as 'Castor oil' and poured out some of it into a bottle ready to take home. He then put up two fingers and without any further argument I paid him two dollars, the price of the dose. Any other comment from me would have endangered the smooth flow of Indo-Chinese relations.

As I stepped out of the drug store, the bell tinkled again and I walked back along the Liang'Lu-kuo to the press hostel, carrying with me the solution to my internal problem.

12

Meeting Chou En-lai

AFTER LUNCH that day I had an appointment. It was with Chou En-lai, one of the triumvirate Edgar Snow had glowingly referred to in his *Red Star Over China*, the other two being Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh. The last named was the commander-in-chief of the Red army.

I went to Chou's town house where he stayed under the close surveillance of Chiang's mysterious intelligence man, Tai Lee. Under the terms of the agreement between the communists and the Kuomintang, Chou was recognised as the official representative of the Red army at the court of Chiang Kai-shek for the duration of the truce when the energies of both were believed to be directed to the common pursuit of war against the Japanese.

In his dark blue serge suit buttoned up in front, Chou looked like a French commercial traveller. He was not very clean shaven that afternoon. He seemed most intent in his outlook and to various questions I asked, which I thought would be difficult to answer, he prefaced his reply with the confident words, "It is clear. . . ." One such question was how the communists, who had once fought Chiang Kai-shek and even made him their prisoner at Sian, not only let him go but entered into a truce to fight the Japanese under his leadership. Chou replied, "It is very clear. We saw in the Generalissimo at that time the only chance China had of uniting as a nation to resist the Japanese aggressor. We stopped fighting the Kuomintang because from that stage

onwards we were to fight side by side against a common enemy".

I found Chou an unusual red. He was very calm, patient in hearing others and never got ruffled. I noticed, however, that he was a little uneasy and restless. He seemed sincere in keeping the pact he had made with Chiang. Chiang the soldier, the communists appeared to respect; inasmuch as he was leading them successfully against the Japanese, Chiang was their hero. The end justified the means. But the communists also maintained that their fight was with the ruling party, the Kuomintang. The two parties stood for mutually exclusive economic and political systems. Each was ready to eliminate the other, but only after they had first disposed of the Japanese invader.

Chou En-lai told me that richard elements in the Kuomintang had effected a blockade against the Red army, which was now called the Eighth Route army. Even a consignment of medical supplies was not permitted to reach them, he alleged. This blockade, he said, was ordered by Chiang's own Minister of War, General Ho Ying Chin. The Eighth Route got no ammunition from the Kuomintang. In its fight against the Japanese it had to fend for itself. Yet Chou spoke of the Generalissimo always with respect. Also when he answered a question concerning the relationship between the Kuomintang and the communists, he appeared to give a balanced view. Perhaps that was only his polished diplomacy, though at that time his sincerity was very convincing. A communist cannot afford the luxury of being sincere. He has always to think in terms of the shortest cut to his main objective.

I asked Chou about India, for that was the time when negotiations between the British and the Indian political leaders had once again bogged down and the call given by the Congress party was to boycott the allied war effort, not to support it. "It is very clear", Chou said characteristically, "that if the nationalist elements in India were to get armed and fight in the war, they would become a fact even as the divisions of our Red army are a fact today". Jawaharlal

Nehru had at that time made one of his typically idealistic remarks about organising guerillas. The idea, like many others of Mr. Nehru, never got any nearer to fulfilment. Nevertheless, Chou was quite fascinated with Nehru's utterance. If the idea of guerilla warfare caught on in India, he said, the defence of India would become really great and the fighting spirit would spread to the countryside and fire the imagination of the people. But Nehru's guerilla warfare got no further than being a mere 'dynamic' utterance. 'Dynamic' was one of his favourite words, oft produced from his storehouse of verbiage. No one had the measure of Nehru at this time; it was the stage when his glamour far outstripped his actual achievements.

Chou on the other hand was a typical product of hard communist training. He would kill his best friend if the cause demanded it. He was working to a purpose with his every move. The individual did not count in his reckoning, whether that individual was himself or someone else. Yet I found Chou very friendly; he was easy to talk to. Men-in-opposition, struggling to attain power, are always most likeable. They have the attraction of being the underdogs struggling for recognition. I recorded that I liked him and there was no reason at that time, not to. Chou also had a great sense of humour, a quality rarely associated with a communist. For instance, when I told him that he hardly looked an army general because he was so young and asked him the naive question, how he became one, he laughed and replied, "All I had to do was to shave off my hair. All generals in China have shaven heads". I think he meant to be caustic in a quiet sort of way about the Generalissimo, who wore his hair crew-cut. Then apropos of nothing, but thoughtfully he added, "When you become the leader of the guerillas fighting the Japanese, I will call you a general too". Funny remark I thought at the time. Yet it was the first time that anyone had attributed to me the ability to play the role of a leader. Nor was this the only compliment Chou paid me that day. He spoke in Chinese to one of his assistants who brought what looked

like a metal badge with some Chinese letters on it. Chou gave it to me saying, "I want you to have this. It is the badge of our Eighth Route army".

I kept this badge with me as a souvenir until 1962, the time of the Chinese attack on Indian territory. Then I threw it away.

Bearing in mind what the Eighth Route meant to its red generals, one of whom was Chou En-lai himself, the gift was a rare compliment. Noticing a metal clasp behind this badge, I immediately tried to pin it on to the front of my jacket. Chou shook his head. "You cannot yet wear this badge where it can be seen. You must wear it as we do, behind the lapel". He showed me how to pin it on so that it would not be seen. The gesture was meant to indicate that he regarded me as a friend, although I was nothing more than a visiting Indian journalist.

Chou wanted to see me again. He would fix up a time and a day when I could go over to his 'office' to have lunch with some of the 'boys'.

"How will you let me know?" I asked, aware of the strict surveillance over him and Tai Lee's effective intelligence machinery focused on his activities.

"We will reach you", was his confident reply.

A few days later I had retired to my *basha* to work after dinner when I heard quick footsteps on the wooden verandah alongside our rooms. It was hardly a verandah; there were just planks of wood held together with nails and tied with string. They clanked when anyone walked over them, particularly when someone walked fast. I was sitting at my writing table near the window. The electric light was just above me. I had stretched out my legs and was reading when I noticed a figure halt outside my open window. I looked up. A young girl's face was framed in that window-sill, young, prettily smiling. In age she could not have been much more than twenty. She had sparkling eyes, a delightfully mischievous face, straight bobbed hair like most Chinese girls have. She wore a dark brown leather jacket gathered at the waist, its collar rolled

up either for style or because she was feeling cold. She stood grinning at me without saying anything. She shot quick and furtive glances around my little room to make sure no one was in it. Then she uttered my name, pronounced in the Chinese way. "Ko La-ka?" she asked. She repeated it to make doubly sure. I confirmed I was the person she was looking for. She then threw me a piece of paper which was rolled up in her hand. With that she hurriedly disappeared, her feet clanking on the wooden planks.

"Sweet", I thought. "Who could she be?" I was too old to be flirted with by a youngster of her age. A kid, an absolute kid, I thought, too young for a man, thirty-one years of age. But what did her *billet-doux* say? I opened it. The writing on it was very immature; the note was written in a babyish, uneducated hand, almost in a kindergarten print with bad spelling. Nevertheless it was decipherable and it was in English. It read: Liang Lu-kuo tomorrow monning seven o'clock corner of Teashop. The name of the teashop was mentioned though I cannot recall it now.

Could that be Chou En-lai's invitation? A general of the Eighth Route army, who spoke fluent English, would surely send me a more sophisticated invitation. The note intrigued me. It was possible the press boys had arranged a leg-pull for me. Yet it did not seem likely because everyone was too busy doing things and Chungking was no place to think up and play practical jokes. It was late enough now. I decided to find out by keeping the blind date.

I got up at six o'clock the next morning, which was a Sunday, had a quick shave, washed my face, sponged my torso in cold water, hurriedly put on some clothes. I got into my dark blue herring-bone London overcoat which was almost a maxi and started out from the press hostel to walk up the Liang Lu-kuo. As Chungking was on a hill, most roads were either uphill or downhill and very often both. The Liang Lu-kuo was Chungking's main street. It was in fact the only street of any consequence.

It stretched across the town, up and down, and it consisted of mostly temporary structures. It had been heavily bombed as judged from the craters in the middle of the road which there was neither time, nor earth, nor spare manpower to repair. It was Chungking. At I paced up the hill a half-mile away from the press hostel, I saw a tea-shop at a corner with another street, a dirty grey squat building stretching from a side street into the Liang Lu-kuo. It appeared to be frequented by working class people. I slowed down my pace as I came near it, then asked a group of yokels, too poor to go inside whether the name of the teashop was the one given to me on the note the night before. No one spoke English of course but they recognised the name of the teashop and four heads, nodding in unison, indicated that it was. The time on my wrist watch said 6.53, so there were seven minutes to go to my appointment. Not knowing who would come to meet me and expecting my rendezvous to be with someone in the tea-room, I walked around its frontage to inform the handful of tea-drinkers inside that I had arrived. But no one looked at me.

At that early hour, there was a nip in the air. I kept myself warm strolling along the curved facade of the teashop, with the lapels of my overcoat turned up which suited the atmosphere of that morning, with a blind date ahead and a pretty courier bearing the strange message to me. But nothing happened. No one came up to me, no one from the tea-room looked up from his teacup, and even the four yokels outside soon lost interest in me. Time was slowing down. I had to be patient, for it was not yet seven o'clock. Three more minutes to go. I felt silly walking up and down, turning back from each end of the cafe. The next few minutes felt even longer than the time they clocked. Seven o'clock it was by my wrist watch and a minute later the old wall clock in the teashop chimed seven times. The time was up and I stood on the pavement outside the curve of the teashop entrance, so that I could be seen from all sides. Being an Indian, I could not be missed. Five minutes past seven and still

nothing happened. I saw a woman coming towards me from afar, and I kept my eyes glued on her, lest she should give a clue where I should go next but when she crossed my path I realised she was so old she could barely see the road, much less could she see me.

I began to give up. By now the street was beginning to get a little busy. Rickshaw coolies had started to move about, some empty, offering to carry me, others with a passenger busily plying. Eight minutes past seven and I was still waiting at the teashop entrance. But at the far end of the Liang Lu-kuo I could see a car, a rare sight in Chungking. It jogged up the hill, puffing and panting, an ancient vintage of a Ford with the rounded bonnet. Must be some Kuomintang officials out on early morning work, I thought, for no one except the government or the army would have a ration of petrol to move a car. The car came towards the teashop, swung in a wide curve and crossed over on to my side of the road, close to where I was standing. The driver, aware that he had taken the turn too wide, pulled up sharply. I noticed there were three men in it, two sitting at the back and a driver in front. As I was moving away from it, I heard a voice in a soft whisper speak my name. I turned to see who had called me, but none of the three in the car seemed to have spoken. The driver, however, had half turned in his front seat and with his right hand stretched over towards the back to open the rear door about an inch as if he wanted me to get in. The two men at the back continued to sit mute and motionless, oblivious of me.

Should I ask who they were or where they were taking me? There was no time for such formalities; the driver seemed impatient. He kept his hand on the door of the puffing Ford indicating he was only waiting for me to get in. I muttered a little Parsi prayer under my breath and got in. The door was closed behind me. The car, put into gear, streaked away, downhill this time, much faster than I had seen it move when it came towards the teashop. I stretched my legs comfortably getting ready to converse with the two men in the middle of whom I sat, but with their

hands dug deep into their coat pockets, their caps pressed down over their foreheads, they kept looking straight ahead and away from me. This odd reception from three total strangers was most peculiar. Then the dread thought crossed my mind: Could they be part of Tai Lee's team taking me for interrogation because of my earlier tea date with Chou En-lai? Perhaps a longer prayer and repeated more often, might ease my much disturbed mind. I felt my pulse; it had clearly jumped from the normal 64 to around 98. This could be due to the morning walk; it could also be the result of the excitement of the uncertainty of the moment. The driver kept driving on. We must have driven some four miles when we approached a hill which had to be climbed, yet not a word from my two Chinese escorts; nor from the driver who was changing down his gears to climb the winding hill road. I consoled myself that perhaps the two men and the driver spoke only Chinese, but if that were so, why did they not speak to each other? Why this funereal look? It was most ominous and unfriendly. From second down to first gear and swinging his steering wheel around, he took a hairpin bend slowing down. As he turned, we were out of sight of Chungking and the Liang Lu-kuo and there was just a hilly, wooded landscape in front of us. There was no humanity or habitation in sight, not an animal, nor even a bird. If this was the road to doom, it was pretty. Suddenly, the three broke out into conversation with each other in Chinese, after which the man on my right said a word in English to me. "Well-comb", it sounded like. The other added, "On behalf of our general, we wellcomb you".

"Who is your general?" I drily asked.

"General Chou En-lai", one of the men said. "All our other generals busy at front".

I felt a little easier for the suspense had been most uncomfortable. My pulse was sure to settle down to an easier pace now that I knew to whom they were taking me. I was eager to ascertain who the girl was who had delivered the message to me the night before, but the tone

of the "well-comb" discouraged me from introducing any light, frivolous or feminine subject into so recently activated a conversation.

Unwilling to betray any trace of curiosity about our destination, I asked how far we had to drive before we met Chou En-lai. It was still some way to go, I was told and the road now would be narrow and more winding. "No one can come without our seeing them", one of the men said.

"Not even Tai Lee?" I asked, uttering a name which was taboo.

The two men beside me jerked; the driver too heard the name and his foot instinctively pressed forward on the accelerator. The car suddenly picked up speed. No one was allowed to utter that name. Why, I never found out. Chou and I had bandied it about and I naturally thought I could do the same with everyone around Chou, but I was wrong. The dreaded name produced instant fright and a feeling of general discomfort with the two men in the back of the car.

After some twenty more minutes of driving we came to a modest villa at the edge of a cliff. This was the 'office' to which Chou had referred and presumably my escorts were some of his 'boys'. He told me later that he chose this location as it would be very difficult to bomb. Everyone in the car became extremely confident the moment we drove into the compound of Chou's villa. Nobody would have believed that only a little while ago we had all been petrified, each in our own way. It must have been past eight o'clock when we arrived at the 'office' of Chou En-lai and the Eighth Route army. The mountain air was damp and chilly for it had rained the last few miles of the journey. Everyone seemed most anxious to protect me from the rain. They gave me cover with an oil-skin overcoat and an umbrella as I stepped out of the car. I was therefore the only one to escape the rain. The others got soaking wet. Soon we were drinking Chinese tea, unsugared of course, an austere blend suited to spartan communist living. No chrysanthemum petals floated on this brew and

there was no aroma and no bouquet. It was plain hot tea. The communists of China in those days had not been indoctrinated into the theory of letting a thousand flowers bloom. Their aim was power, and power only came from the barrel of a gun, their leader had told them. This is the idealism which precedes the advent of every new political society before it sinks low enough to prove Lord Acton's theory of power corrupting and absolute power corrupting absolutely, whether it be communist, socialist, fascist, or any brand of power that is created out of nothing, with only force to bring it into being and force to sustain the continuity of its existence.

There was a humility in that early struggle of the Chinese communists of which I became aware. They seemed to speak a different dialect then. Those were the days when a Chinese still quoted Confucius; no one quoted Mao to me.

As we sat around, still only the 'boys' and I, an old man who was a trade union expert came and sat in the room. His hair was snow white, his moustache like twirled cotton, drooping at the corners of his lips. When he smiled he showed a good set of teeth though spaced out a little more than usual. He wore a black coat buttoned up in front. He seemed intensely eager to collect facts about India. His questions to me were fact-finding and the subjects in which he was interested were labour conditions, defence, political leadership in India, regional biases, the trade unions' hold over the industrial workers and so on. It was an advanced type of information he was seeking. A vague, wishy-washy answer would not have sufficed in reply. I became alarmed at the immensity of his knowledge about my country in comparison to the little we in India knew about China, and about the fast growth of its communist movement whose workers I was now meeting at close quarters.

Cheng, who was Chou's little secretary, came into the room to join in our conversation. He had got wet in the rain and had changed into clothes which did not fit him. As I looked puzzled, he held up his hands to show me how

long his sleeves were, adding, "Not mine. Belongs to comrade. I put mine to dry". Then the serious conversation between the old man and myself was resumed. In communism, one does not pause to laugh at trifles. Misfits in clothes are incidental; only important facts matter, the facts on which major decisions are made. Communism has no inbuilt humour. It has no time to laugh, either before it comes into power because the struggle to achieve its objective is so grim, or after it captures the reins of office, when the suppression of all opposition to itself is even grimmer.

Chou came in soon thereafter. He seemed to light up the room with his electric presence. We all stood up for the general. The 'boys' waited till he and I had sat down before resuming their seats. This was the discipline of the party, one of the foundations on which a communist regime is built. Chou's presence produced a smile of relief on the faces of followers. From now on he took charge of the conversation.

Chou took over from the elderly trade unionist who was still firing away his questions at me. I got a breather only when I turned to Chou and said, "Your Chinese communists know more about India than we Indian journalists know about our own country". Chou turned to his old 'boy' and spoke to him in Chinese, finishing up the last bit of his remarks in English. He explained to the trade unionist that it was not a statistical and documented picture of India which he should expect from me. "But his assessment of political values", Chou said, referring to me, "I find most interesting". He was referring to our earlier tea-time talk at his town house. Chou changed the trend of the discussion; it became broader based. He often reverted to the reluctance of the Indian to fight. He kept saying, "If only India fights, she becomes a fact".

The trend of the questions I was asked about India indicated to me that Chou and the communists had no interest in Mahatma Gandhi's quaint philosophy of non-violence and that new weapon he had developed for our

political struggle, called 'civil disobedience'. Chou's attitude was not one of disrespect to Gandhian philosophy; he courteously left it alone and veered away from it each time I brought it into conversation. He was inclined to look upon it as a regional idiosyncrasy, suited to local Indian conditions and of no material interest to the planning of the communist expansion of China. Chou's interest was in India as a kindred base for communism. I did not realise its implication at the time; in later years it became 'clear' to me, to borrow a word Chou so often used.

Recalling this conversation in Chou's mountain villa, I have often wondered whether the decision of communist China to invade Tibet some years later, ignoring suzerainty which India had over it from the days of the British, was based on the opinion Chou had then formed, namely that Indians would never fight outside their homeland. Chou was not wrong in his estimate, for Mr. Nehru gave up Tibet and its independence which was in our protection without firing a shot in defence. He surrendered it with his shocking phrase, 'the Tibet region of China'.

Judging from their great interest in Indian affairs, I believed that there must have been some early Indian contacts which had sparked it off. I was therefore amazed when I later learned that their knowledge of Indian conditions was purely academic. It was part of the requirements of a communist not only to have facts about his own country at his finger tips but also all available knowledge about neighbouring countries. As India shared a frontier with China, we came in the category of immediate neighbours. As expansion was essential to communist ideology, this was understandable. But to my surprise one of the 'boys' said, "We get so interested because you are the first Indian we meet".

I looked around the room from face to face — young Cheng, the old white-haired trade unionist, the two men between whom I had sat in the car, the motor driver, an editor of a Chinese communist paper who spoke English fluently and finally at Chou En-lai. There was silence as

I looked around not believing what I had heard. Communists usually establish links with kindred souls in other countries quite easily. India, particularly Bengal, had already produced enough communists, leftists and terrorists who were known to have established contacts with places as far away as Moscow in Soviet Russia. It was difficult to believe that the leftists of China had not exchanged fraternal greetings and established pen-friendships with like-minded Indians in India. But Chou confirmed, "Yes, I never met an Indian before you. I had seen one, yes, but I never talked to an Indian before. You have turned out very different from what I expected".

I was somewhat overwhelmed, almost embarrassed having to shoulder the responsibility of being representative of my country in this communist hide-out on a hillock outside Chungking. Sent out by Sir Frederick Puckle, introduced by Jawaharlal Nehru — this much Chou knew about me — I was not a stooge of the British; but obviously, I was also not the orthodox brand of Indian who later came to be known as a '*satyagrahi*' or a non-violent freedom fighter. They must have wondered what I really was. Chou himself seemed least concerned. His mind was glued to his prime objective which was the defeat of the Japanese invader and at the back of his mind must have been the second stage of the struggle, the defeat of the Kuomintang and the obliteration of the society which sustained it in power. He succeeded in both, and in a shorter space of time than anyone had anticipated.

It was well past noon and we had been sitting around in the same room, talking, discussing, explaining to each other what each wanted to know. Twice during the morning we had rounds of Chinese tea, unsweetened, unsophisticated, thirst-quenching. Then lunch was announced and we moved to another room. Chou's wife now came on the scene, a kindly person, matronly in appearance. Along with the two girl workers, she had cooked chow for us and was now waiting to serve it to the men seated around the table. It was the same idea as in my country; the men ate first.

The equality of women was not yet established.

Chou introduced me to his wife. She was referred to as Chou En-lai Tai-Tai. I stood up to bow to her, but I was the only one to get up for her. She said something to me in Chinese which I did not understand but she did not shake hands; she merely looked shy and embarrassed. I think Chou told her I was from India and she in turn commented on that fact. The two girl workers came round with bowlfuls of steaming Chinese soup. I was asked to sit down. Cheng, the secretary, volunteered the information, "Chou En-lai Tai-Tai is deeply engrossed in social work and how you say?" He turned to the communist editor for the right phrase. The newspaperman said, 'woman uplift'. I dipped my spoon into the hot soup and started sipping it.

Lunch was simple and wholesome. Chou made a good host, anxious to see that my bowl was always full. He picked the best bits out of every dish and offered them to me. Because I was slow with my chopsticks, he did not want me to lag behind. With lunch, Szechwan wine was served, a raw potent brew, which had not been allowed to mellow with age. Mixed with the mountain air, it made me extremely drowsy. After lunch I dozed off in a chair.

In the early afternoon they drove me back to town. We returned in the same car in which they had collected me outside the teashop in the Liang Lu-kuo. The car had been left outside the muddy compound so that its wheels would not sink in the slush. It was still raining and we had to walk in single file down a narrow path to meet the car on the hill road.

I walked behind Chou, who had lifted his trousers to avoid the slush. He wore a brown felt hat of considerable vintage; it had curled up at the brim. Tucked under his arm was his valise, also much used. He seemed to walk alone and apart from the surrounding scene with his thoughts far away. The general in him was wanting to lead, even though here in the rain and over the green mountainside it was only a single file of half a dozen people

he was leading. It was an unforgettable moment, though Chou with the success that came to him in later years would not remember it now.

We talked on the drive back from Chou's 'office' until we came towards the Liang Lu-kuo and the main line of traffic, even though traffic in Chungking consisted merely of pedestrians and rickshaws. Then conversation in the car abruptly dried up. The shadow of Tai Lee must have come into view. We drove on to Chou's town house where we stopped for a while. Chou and I waited in the car while some of the 'boys' went in. I could not make out what was happening but I presumed it was a halt to check on the news. Only couriers could bring news to Chou from the front. No other news would pass Chiang's censorship which seemed to be tight.

Our car was parked outside a huge well-built house with a big compound. I knew it was not Chou's house, for it was one of the grander mansions of China's war-time capital in comparison with the temporary structures built of string and bamboo. A sentry stood guard outside its main gate. I asked Chou who lived there. He smiled and said, "Tai Lee, my distinguished neighbour". While his smile broadened, his voice was quiet. He did not want the sentry to hear. Despite the outer layer of unity, I could sense the bitterness between the Kuomintang and the Chinese communists. Only the common war against Japan held them together.

Chou dropped me outside the press hostel and drove back to his home. Had he driven into our compound and been seen by the press boys, it would have given me much face as the Chinese say. But I was left to leak out my story which was less satisfying to my ego. I was tired and soon dropped off to sleep. It had turned very cold with the rain and when I awoke some two hours later, I was frozen stiff. A glass of hot cocoa made by myself warmed me up. Cocoa was available from the British Embassy's PX. We were allowed a courtesy ration. I sat down to type out the script of my evening broadcast

to India. The lights had fused and with a candle I read the news communique which was put out after sunset each day. The failure of electricity was not an encouraging sign for the lights over Burma also seemed to be dimming.

I made Chou the focal point of my evening broadcast to India. I began with the words, "Today I met Chou En-lai, one of the triumvirate which dominates the Red army and the communists of China..." I handed my script in to the military censors who vetted all the messages which we foreign correspondents filed to destinations abroad. My daily radio broadcast from Chungking came in this category. The young Chinese censor in whose window I placed my copy knew me by now. He had seen my earlier scripts to India and apparently liked what I said about his country and its stout war effort. With a smile he picked up my script today. Then, as if something had hit him between the eyes, he gasped, "Toe En-lie?" That's how Chinese pronounced Chou's name. "Toe En-lie?", he repeated, unbelievably. I nodded to confirm I really had met the Red general. Without reading any more, he took the script over to the chief military censor whose desk was in the centre of the room. I waited to see what the latter's blue pencil would strike out and whether over Chiang Kai-shek's radio I would be allowed even to mention the name of Chou En-lai. But the chief censor was most reasonable. He passed my script deleting only the part where I had said that Chiang referred to the communists as "bandits". I went to the microphone and India heard for the first time that an Indian newspaperman had met Chou En-lai. I did not realise the importance of that radio broadcast from Chungking that day. To me it was just one of my thirty broadcasts to India. It was a good one, I thought; it was interesting, new in its content, but that was all I had thought it to be.

A day or two later, I received a belated answer to my request to see the Chiang Kai-sheks. Despite Mr. Nehru's introduction through Dr. Pao, the Kuomintang foreign office had been sluggish about my request. Now that news had spread in official circles that Chou En-lai had seen me, my importance grew in the estimation of the Chinese bureaucrats. It was at a large formal party given for the American Volunteer Group by Dr. Kung, who married Madame Chiang's elder sister, that I noticed the foreign office become aware of my presence. More than one high official opened conversation with the words, "You have met Chou En-lai?" I said I had. "Now you will meet Madame Chiang Kai-shek. We are arranging it", the official said. Why now? Why not all these days, I asked myself. My request was made the very day I had arrived in Chungking. That it had to be Madame Chiang and not the Generalissimo was understandable for he was at the front conducting military operations against the Japanese.

Soon thereafter the message from the Foreign Office arrived. Madame Chiang would be pleased to receive me. She had invited me to tea. An official car would convey me to her residence. I was asked to be ready.

The occasion demanded a bath different from sponging the upper torso which was enough for my meeting with Chou and his 'boys'. Hot water had to be organised and paid for in advance. I decided also to run my razor over my beard a second time that day. I put on my check-patterned suit of English tweed which I had brought with me for just such an occasion. I chose a clean shirt and splashed eau de toilette on my linen handkerchief. As I stepped into the car the foreign office had sent for me, I felt as if I were an ambassador, though appointed by no one but myself. I was on my way to have tea with the first lady of China.

We drove to the residence of the Chiang Kai-sheks. The Generalissimo's house was on the top of a hill, and for security reasons all visitors had to walk up from the entrance, leaving their cars at the foot of the hill. The day was warm.

The armed guard was heavier than anywhere else in Chungking, which was understandable, and even though mine was an expected visit we had to halt three times between the front gate and the house. My pilgrimage was interrupted by periodic questioning by the guards. But, when my escort from the Foreign Office indicated to them that I was privileged to have tea with Madame Chiang Kai-shek, they started tapping their rifles by way of salute and, equally formally, I reciprocated by bowing low as is the Chinese custom when a civilian receives a military salute.

I was shown into the living room which was very simply decorated, almost bare except for an occasional piece of crystal and jade. The wooden furniture was, however, not of unpolished deal wood as at Chou En-lai's mountain shack. I was told madam would soon be here. I did not mind waiting for I enjoyed looking over the home of the leader of the Chinese people. Not long thereafter the beautiful Mei-ling Soong Chiang came in from a side door. She was undoubtedly one of the great beauties of the world of her day. She spoke to me in short, clipped sentences. She tripped quickly and delicately across the room, her movements being somewhat agitated. She seemed to be nervous and restless. Five years of bitter war with the Japanese must have told on her, yet she was beautiful to look at and her feminine movements were exquisite to watch. She adorned the room with her presence. She shook hands. Then, as if she was addressing a dumbfounded little boy, she said, "Sit down. Let me give you a cup of tea. You had asked to see my husband but as you will understand he is not here at the present moment". Security demanded that she should not reveal either his whereabouts or his present activity.

I was not sorry. Madame Chiang may not have filled in the blanks of my understanding of China's war effort but in the gallery of contemporary womanhood she was unquestionably a stunning portrait, an exhibit which rated a gold star. One paused to look at her. It was not just the face that made this woman; it was the composite frame

the lissomeness of her shoulders and the subtle attraction of her well-shaped upper torso. The long exquisitely shaped legs. She wore patent leather shoes. She was in her prime at that time, like an apple tree in rich blossom. Such perfection of beauty unfortunately does not last forever, nor do they in womanhood repeat themselves for many springs. And when autumn sets in, it never changes to spring again. But beauty as exquisite as hers and so carefully chiselled is never erased from the memory of those who saw her in those years.

Not long after I had sat down, she asked me, "Tell me, I am interested, how do you happen to represent both a nationalist paper in India and the government of India which is British?"

"Because on China they think alike", I replied. I began to feel more at ease with her after these early remarks. But soon she shot another difficult question, "What brought you to China?"

The real reason for my undertaking this trip, which was difficult to arrange, not only in terms of finance but also because of the official permissions one had to obtain, was my search for an opportunity to be able to show what I could do on the broad spectrum of international affairs. We were concerned in India with only an internal problem, bickering with the British. A war was going on in the outside world in which human freedom was involved. Too narrow or insular an attitude was stifling to an educated man. India was thinking only in terms of herself, which to some extent was justifiable in the context of the political inequality between an imperial power and its colonial subjects. Yet there was a feeling in some of us that a nation finds greatness not only in its own fight for freedom, but by participating in the fight for other peoples' freedoms. In holding this view I was in a minority in my country.

There was also, I must confess, the desire of a young man to show himself off on a world platform and like a peacock show his feathers. This was not always for self-gratification. Perhaps there was also a desire that the

feathers may be seen by the fairer sex. When I mentioned this to Madame Chiang she leaned forward in her chair saying: "Tell me more. It interests me". I informed her that the idea of the interview was that I should be the interviewer, not her. But she was femininely curious. "Come another time for that", she interrupted me. "Today let's sit and talk about unimportant things". So we sat and we talked. Why were there not more women like her in the world?

When I asked her later whether there would be a possibility for me to meet the Generalissimo, she replied, "If you wait a fortnight you can have that interview". Unfortunately my dates could not be altered, and I had come almost to the end of my one month's stay. Besides, no one could say where the Generalissimo was or how long he would be away. There were indications that he was far away in Burma. According to others who pretended to be more knowledgeable, he was on the Yunan border.

Madame Chiang was not to be rated in terms of an attractive fashion model in Chungking. She had a sharp brain, capable of expressing itself in powerful words and of assessing situations which were of fundamental importance to her country and her people.

But that day in Chungking in her simple, very dignified home, she was standing me tea and doughnuts, asking me questions and talking about herself. She wore black that afternoon, the smart dull charcoal black of chic Paris. She wore no jewellery. Her only adornment was the emblem of the American Volunteer Group, of which her country had reason to be proud. The A.V.G. had now bombed Tokyo and retaliated for all the months and months of bombing Chungking had had. By wearing that little emblem, she was expressing her silent gratitude to the young Americans who were risking their lives in the defence of her country.

When tea was over, she offered me a cigarette from a little green jade cigarette case. The cigarettes she smoked were State Express 999, goldtipped. She smoked one

herself through a nine-inch black and gold cigarette holder, which had the Dunhill white spot on it. Her intense realism seemed incongruous in terms of her delicate femininity.

I had taken with me a tiny present to give her in accordance with the oriental custom of not arriving empty handed at a first meeting. It was a medium sized bottle of eau-de-cologne, Chanel No. 5. I gave it to her in the thin brown paper wrapping in which I had bought it from a smuggler in Bombay.

"What is it?" she asked.

"A little present for you. Very small, but difficult to obtain in Chungking".

"My I open it?" she asked and proceeded to unwrap the brown paper. Then with almost childish delight she exclaimed, "Oh, Chanel! Numéro Cinq. Haven't seen it for years". She was most appreciative of the thought that brought that gift to war-time Chungking.

Soon thereafter I left. Down the hill I walked to my car, while the armed guard tapped the butts of their rifles in salute. My escort and I drove back to the press hostel. I was in a lovely daze. I hardly spoke to the official who brought me back. "Good interview?" he asked. I indicated with a nod that it was. But my mind was full of new assessments. I became aware of the sharp contrast between the communists around Chou En-lai and the Kuomintang which appeared to be taking life too leisurely, ignoring the fast developing scene. At the hostel I got out. The press boys were now aware where I had been.

A few days later I received word from the Foreign Office that a seat on the plane had been booked for me. I would be leaving soon after lunch the next day. It seemed an abrupt, inconclusive end to my month's stay, a walk out from the press hostel to the C.N.A.C.'s Dakota. No one would know I was leaving. That was a saddening thought. I seemed to miss the glory of a dramatic exit.

The next morning, however, a high official drove into the compound of our hostel. As a motor car was a rare sight, we turned out of our rooms to see who had arrived. Cere-

moniously he stepped out of his limousine, carrying a large package in his hands. He made an enquiry of one of the maid servants of our hostel and she pointed towards my room. I stood still. I saw him walk up in his high buttoned suit, the traditional garment of a Chinese bureaucrat. From the quality of the suiting, the cut of the suit and the genuineness of the horn of his buttons one could tell he was high up in the bureaucracy.

He walked along the wooden planks of our verandah, halted in front of my room and in a soft voice asked, "Ko La-ka shi-shi?" I indicated that I was that person. Holding the package with both his hands he bowed low and handed it over with the words, "I am commanded by Madame Chiang Kai-shek to present this to you". We exchanged a few formal words thanks. Then he turned around and went back to his waiting limousine and drove away. I took the package into my room and opened it. In it was a picture of the Generalissimo in the uniform of a Marshal of China, sword in hand. On the white mounting of that picture was the autograph. In Chinese it read: "To Ko La-ka shi-shi from Chen Chung-Sung". Below it was his red seal which made it both an official and personal gift.

I felt as if Chiang Kai-shek himself had turned out to bid me farewell. I celebrated the arrival of this gift, somewhat rashly with a rare treat of "flesh fly eggs", which a Chinese chappie was selling at the airport at an enormous price, ready to eat, before the air trip. These were the first fresh eggs I had tasted for a month. The taste did not stay long with me, for before we reached Kunming, they were out in the brown paper bag kept on all aircraft in the event of air-sickness.

I returned to Bombay via Calcutta. A few days later I was asked to an informal luncheon given by the well-known Indian industrialist, J. R. D. Tata and his wife. It was for Mr. Nehru who had just been released from detention. Nehru was passing through Bombay. It was a sit-down lunch for about a dozen people and aware that I had just returned from Chungking I was an object of much interest. No one, however, knew that Nehru himself, through Consul

General Pao, had arranged for my introductions in Chungking.

At the table, I sat almost opposite Nehru. He was not feeling very bright that day. He looked tired. He spoke with considerable effort. His mind was many miles away. I did not want to intrude on his privacy of thought but soon he faced me and asked, "How did your visit go?"

I took the opportunity to thank him personally, for his introduction had opened many a door for me. He was aware it undoubtedly would. Then he asked, "And what was your impression?" Nehru often asked such questions when obviously he had no time or inclination to listen to a reply. It was typical of him, for I knew it did not matter to him what my impression was once he had formed his own. "Well, sir", I said quite tersely, "Madame Chiang was absolutely beautiful". He agreed with that. "But I don't think your friends will last long in China".

Nehru jerked at that remark. He turned towards me, lifting his eyes from his plate of food. Then with a supercilious look on his face, he said, "You don't think".

"No sir", I was more emphatic. "They won't last long", I repeated. His look was obviously meant to be crushing, implying that I did not know what I was talking about.

Nehru ignored my assessment but the Chinese proved me to be more accurate than my prime minister. In 1949 the communists came into power pushing Chiang out of the mainland to take harbour in the island of Formosa. Chiang's army, rotted by the corrosion within itself and provoked by communist sabotage, folded up on him. Overnight, 'his' men whipped out the Eighth Route army metal badge, the same which Chou had given to me, and flaunted it on their caps, virtually declaring a mutiny. Mao Tse-tung became the symbol of the new regime and Chou the new head of government.

Nehru also ignored my later assessment of the Chinese communists in power and the dangers of yielding to their first claim on Tibet. He did not agree it would pave the way to a threat on our own sovereignty. Tibet went to

China and the holy Dalai Lama came down to us on foot. The incarnation of the Lord Buddha, Nehru allowed into India as a refugee! But Nehru went to Palam airport personally to receive Chou En-lai. He welcomed the Chinese Prime Minister with an embrace.

Into Uniform

WITH AN exclusive meeting with Chou En-lai on the mountainside in Chungking and an exotic meeting with Madame Chiang over cups of jasmine flavoured tea, I was riding on the crest of a wave. I was unaware that while I returned clutching an autographed picture of the Generalissimo, his government¹ had registered a protest about me with the Government of India. They complained I had committed an 'unfriendly act' by praising Chou En-lai over their radio which they had allowed me to use for my broadcasts to India. The British who ran the government in India, acted with characteristic tact; unconvinced by the Chinese protest, they said nothing to me about it, but to keep the Chinese happy, they quietly passed orders that I should not be asked to broadcast for the time being. They informed the Chinese about the action taken. The sequel to this story was that when the British handed over All India Radio to the Indians, it seemed they forgot to lift the ban!

My next assignment was as a war correspondent to the nearby China-Burma India theatre of war where General Slim commanded the Indian 14th Army which was resisting the Japanese thrust into Imphal. My mind, however, was focussed on the bigger war being fought in the west. I felt the need to see the Western Front where the fighting had been fiercest for five long years. Even if I could witness the

¹ Kuomintang

last days, I felt I would have seen something of it.

In Bombay, the Governor was Sir John Colville. He had a military secretary called Colonel Palk. Palk was an Englishman with whom I had no difficulty in getting on. His pet name was Mug. "You haven't called on H.E.", the Colonel said to me one day. The British were sticklers for form. "H.E. has asked you to dinner at G.H. and we hope you'll accept". H.E. was His Excellency and G.H. stood for government house.

"I was thinking about that myself", I told the Colonel. "The trouble is that if I sign the visitors' book once, I'll be invited to every tea party you give."

"Well", Mug said, "I'll see that doesn't happen. In fact, so long as you mean to call, we cannot really get offended. I can sign the book on your behalf myself". Not wanting to shirk a courtesy, I signed the book the same day on my way home. It was not difficult for I lived in a flat opposite the Walkeshwar gate of government house.

It was Mug who got Sir John to push Delhi to open up for me the way to the Western Front. Mug again who armed me with two valuable letters of introduction from the Governor, one to Field Marshal Alexander, the other to Britain's Home Secretary, then Lord Munster. As Mug said, "If the Home Secretary knows you, there should be no trouble for you at all when you are in England".

So I started. It was December of 1944 and I set off on my first lap to the Western Front. The scene at home was depressing. The Cripps¹ offer had been turned down. The Congress party, which was the leading political organisation in India, was the first to condemn fascist aggression, but it contradicted itself by advocating India's abstention from the war effort. It was carried away by its slogan 'Quit India'². Mahatma Gandhi continued to believe even after the Japanese army had swept through Burma and crossed the Somra tracts on India's border³, that he could hold the invading Japanese with non-violence and civil disobedience,

¹ Sir Stafford Cripps. ² August 1942. ³ March 1944.

the magic formula which had worked with the British. To leave India at such a time was to escape frustration.

I went by boat to Karachi, where I caught the Imperial Airways flying boat, the *Cameronian*. My route lay along the border of Baluchistan, past Dubai on the Gulf. Bahrain was next and by evening we had arrived at Basrah in Iraq, where we glided down on the placid waters of the Shatt-al-Arab. Here we stayed the night.

The next morning we took off early, over Lake Habbanyah and the Dead Sea, over Palestine to our eventual destination which was Cairo. The *Cameronian* anchored on the Nile. It was December 22, three days to Christmas. Cairo was getting ready for the festive season. In two days on the flying boat I had flown from India, over Baluchistan, Palestine, Iran, Arabia, Iraq and the Holy Land, over Jericho, past Jerusalem, over the river Jordan and I had now come to the land of the Pharoahs, which was the Egypt of the young and headstrong King Farouk. India seemed far behind.

The month I spent in Cairo is only of personal interest now. I met and lunched with Lord Killearn¹ who exercised the most powerful influence on both the late King Fuad and Farouk. Killearn had to be firm with the young king whereas he had only to be persuasive with Fuad.

During those weeks, I closely studied the Balfour declaration to which is to be traced the origin and creation of Israel; I interviewed Nahas Pasha the popular hero of Egypt in that day and spent long hours with several lesser *pashas* who had held sway over Egypt. Yet all that is of no consequence now for it is not the same Egypt any more and since the revolution I have not seen the land of the Pharoahs again. All I know is that what was a main waterway and a lifeline to developing countries such as my own, is now a silted canal with its banks soaked in a bitterness which may take generations to erase from the minds of men. If the Arab continues to look to the Soviet Union for the

¹ Formerly Sir Miles Lampson.

solution of his problems, he will never find one; if instead he turns to Allah, his God, he may.

At the time the problem of Palestine appeared insoluble to me. I failed to see how two peoples so different in temperament, constantly clashing with each other could live side by side in harmony. There was a different view expressed by Sir Arthur Wanchope, former High Commissioner of Palestine who said, "During the ten years I spent in Iraq and in Palestine whenever I saw the dome of a village mosque, I felt I saw something that guards a noble tradition; when I heard the prayer of a muezzin come strong and insistent from a village minaret at dawn or dusk, I heard something that called on men to live up to a certain standard of conduct, to remember spiritual things, rather than material".

But with the more materialistic outlook of my younger days I regarded the problem and its solution as being entirely economic and I believed that no amount of domes, minarets and muezzins could produce accord between the two warring peoples. This belief was accentuated when I saw the little Arab urchin walk past the opulent shop windows of Cairo's Kasr-el-Nil, his shabby clothes and his puny figure silhouetted against the expensive display of merchandise which came from Palestine to be sold in Cairo. But that was my brain working with the help of logic and reasoning, and with the education received in over three years at Oxford. Faith which comes to simple people without sophisticated educations, had yet to come to me.

I left Cairo for Italy in a Dakota at two o'clock in the morning. Almost immediately after take-off I removed my army great-coat, spread it on the floor at the tail end of the plane and went to sleep on it. A Polish General, a Turkish Ambassador and some Red Cross nurses who were

my fellow passengers, smiled at each other, amused at my unorthodox behaviour. But the next morning when I awoke feeling fresh, I found His Excellency the Turk sprawled on the floor at my feet, the Pole doubled up over his double chin and the Red Cross nurses uncomfortably dozing with their heads balanced against each other.

We breakfasted at El Adam, lunched at Malta and by four o'clock that afternoon we touched down at Naples, which was our destination. To my surprise I was met by an R.A.F., squadron leader, who whisked me through immigration, customs and security and drove me into town in a staff car. Such special handling was a trifle overwhelming. At the Hotel Excelsior also, I was given a very courteous welcome and a room with an excellent view and an ornate bathtub. As I had been well looked after at Shepherd's¹, after my name had figured in the Cairo newspapers as having lunched with Lord Killearn, I was inclined to attribute such special attention to the fact that I was an Indian war correspondent. But soon, when I had washed and brushed my hair and was propping the bar downstairs for a drink with a Colonel Kirkness, whom I had known in India, I realised that the airport reception and the 'room with bath' were not meant for me at all. The Turkish Ambassador who arrived at the hotel two hours later in a dilapidated airport coach seemed most annoyed that he had not received the diplomatic courtesies to which he was accustomed. There had obviously been a mix-up between our names. His was Tarara. Kirkness was unwittingly the cause of this. Aware that I was arriving on this plane, he had been telephoning Airport Control about me more than once. When the R.A.F., at Naples got the signal that Mr. Tarara was to be treated as a V.I.P., they thought the spelling of the name must be wrong. "No fault of yours", Kirkness said, "if you looked the most important person on the plane".

The Colonel drove me in his jeep to Rome the next day.

¹ The original hotel, gutted by fire.

We drove along Highway 6 which passed through Cassino. This was the little Italian hilltown on which stood the monastery of St. Benedict. Normally known for its liqueur, it became an almost impregnable fortress of the Nazis during the war. Not far from the road over which we drove, were clusters of neat wooden crosses, painted white, for the battle for Monte Cassino was one of the deadliest on the road to Rome.

I moved around Italy from Rome to Florence, then to Bagni San Giuliano and Bagni San Lucca near Pisa, where Indian regiments were located, back via Livirnio and Grosseto, down the beautiful Italian coast; I went to a little town in the mountains in the north where Pippo one of the best known of the Italian partisans operated behind the German lines. He came over to have breakfast with me and to visit his pregnant wife! No German position was regarded safe when Pippo and his guerillas were around. Pippo organised a guard of honour of his guerilla band for me, followed by a march past. As they came down the side of the mountain, they sang *Rebelli*, their marching song.

I drove around Italy in a jeep with the insignia of an eye, indicating an observer. The word INDIA was painted on its number plate. So popular were my countrymen in Italy then, a reputation largely gained by the 8th and 10th Indian Divisions, that the locals in the little town and village squares through which I drove would cheer me, exclaiming, "*Indiano ! Indiano !*" Occasionally a *viva* would also be thrown in. It was music to my ears.

One day I was on my way to Caserta, south-west of Rome, for my interview with Field Marshal Alexander. Godfrey Talbot, head of the B.B.C., in the Mediterranean theatre with whom I drove down on that trip, likened Alexander to 'a highly strung racehorse, shy in the paddock before a race'. An exclusive interview was against the British War Office's directive; no supreme commander was permitted to give an exclusive interview to an individual correspondent. I maintained my case was different. I was the only Indian

correspondent in the area of his command. There were Indian troops fighting under him who had never got any special mention. What he would say to me would appear in an Indian newspaper. Alexander himself had a special connection with India; he was a colonel in the 32nd Punjab regiment; he had commanded the Nowshera brigade from 1934 to 1937.

Alexander agreed to my request and received me in his magnificent office at the Caserta Palace the morning after I arrived at his headquarters. A product of Harrow the English public school and Sandhurst, Britain's military academy, he was an absolute aristocrat. He had unassailable dignity, tempered with wry humour, subtle charm, grace and gentility. He was the supreme commander of the allied forces in the Mediterranean. Describing the individual characteristics of the soldiers of various countries, he observed about our lads, "The Indian soldier likes to have time to prepare for a big-scale attack. He does not like being hustled into it".

It was a generous interview both in time and expression, chiefly because he wanted to acknowledge the part the Indian soldier had played all the way from Africa through Italy. Those views are of little topical value today but the answer he gave to my last question is still worth repeating. At the end of my interview I said, "I would like to ask you one question, sir, which is probably personal". The Field Marshal nodded. "You were the last man out of Dunkirk", I continued, "It is said you went around in a launch to make sure all your men had got away. What were your personal feelings at that moment?"

He put his head down to think out his answer, then he replied, "I believed that we as a people would not be conquered. Britain has not been conquered since the days of William the Conqueror. But I could not see how the war would ever be won. Yet you see it has happened."

After seven or eight weeks in Italy, the last few days being spent in the Italian mountains, I made a quick trip to London mainly to collect the blue card of the British War Office which was being issued to me. It entitled me 'to follow British forces in the field', a passport to anywhere. As of that time I was a double war correspondent, Indian as well as British, a technical distinction, for I was Indian all the time. In addition, as General Mark Clark the showman of the U.S. Army had given me special permission to wear shoulder badges on both arms, I wore the additional flash of the U.S. Fifth Army. I may have looked like a Christmas gift in its Christmas wrapping but at all checkpoints of security, I was quickly cleared.

The plane in which I flew to England landed at an airport a good distance away from London. The airstrip was wet; "intermittent rain", the weather forecast had said. From another plane which landed soon after ours, I saw a young R.A.F., officer alight. He was met by an attractive Waaf¹ and they walked together towards the terminal, arm in arm. The young man's laughter was full and he seemed very sure of himself. He carried no luggage in his hands; only a stick. He kept hugging the girl who had come to receive him. Most odd, I thought, for a wartime airport where discipline was so strictly observed; it was usually no place for so snug a scene. But when he came near to me, I quickly made way for him, for I saw the lad was blind in both eyes. Yet I heard him say quite happily, "I can smell I am home again". The girl looked at me as I stood to attention in silent salute to a hero of the war, unknown to me. The security check at the airport was heavy but once I was cleared I began to feel a new warmth at returning to England, despite the weather which was damp and cold as ever. We drove by coach to Swindon station to catch a train to London. Railway stations looked different with women porters in pants, their large bottoms not showing to advantage in the rough dark blue serge of the British

¹ A member of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

railways. The train was full and the people in it looked very tired. The fatigue of the war was showing.

By the time we reached Paddington that evening, it was pitch dark. The blackout was complete. I struggled with the help of a stranger to drag my 65 lbs of luggage along the platform, shared a cab with him to his house in Upper Grosvenor Street where he kindly gave me dinner. He helped me carry my bags to the Dorchester hotel which was nearby. As I walked in through its swivelling doors, unshaven and unbathed, the hall porter must have wondered whether I had come to the right hotel and if so, had I used the right entrance. But he did not show any surprise for with much tact he merely said, "Can I help you, sir?"

"You certainly can. Please get me someone from Reception. I want a bed, otherwise I shall fall asleep here, standing up". He immediately went away and soon an attractive receptionist emerged, looking sympathetically at me. "Have you a reservation, sir?" she asked in the usual way.

"Young lady, where I have been the last few days there were no telephones". She understood my unhelpful reply but her difficulty was that she did not have a room available for that night.

"Not a bed anywhere? In the pantry or the kitchen?"

"I am afraid not", she said, amused at my desperate request. She asked for my name which gave me a whiff of hope. "My name will mean nothing to you, but I have a letter of introduction to your Mr. Anton Bon, from Mr. Faletti of the Taj Mahal Hotel".

I knew Bon was a wizard. If plum puddings could be made without plums, perhaps Anton Bon could give me a bedroom without a bed or vice-versa. I opened my suitcase and produced the letter. She went with it into an inner office probably for consultation with higher authority. Meanwhile I waited at the Reception counter and thought. A few moments later she re-appeared, the letter still in her hand, unopened. She said, "I am sure Mr. Bon will be able to do something for you — tomorrow. But I really

don't see what I can do tonight".

Sometimes I believe a man has to make up a woman's mind for her. This was one such moment. I bent down to my suitcase once again. It lay half open on the floor at my feet. I dug around the sides till I found a large thin cellophane cover. "This", I said, "is another letter of introduction, but to you".

Her face became animated as she read the name of a well-known French couturier in gold on the cover. It was a pair of silk stockings I had bought in Rome. I had paid six packets of English cigarettes for them. Cigarettes in wartime Europe were as acceptable as local currency. She turned around to inspect the pile of cards neatly arranged in an index box behind her. She studied them carefully for over ten minutes, flipping them up and down. "I don't have a free bedroom", she said, shaking her head, "but if you will take a seat in the lounge, I'll see if I can arrange a temporary bed for the night in one of our private reception rooms. Only for tonight! Tomorrow you have a word with Mr. Bon". I adjusted my cap from the tired angle into which it had slouched and saluted her. I handed over the introduction to women which I still held in my hand. I ambled into the great lounge of the Dorchester deserted now for it was 11.30 p.m. I took off my heavy great-coat, sat down and asked a waiter to bring me some hot coffee. Twenty minutes later, I was shown into an immense long room, the dining table of which had been moved to one side and a bed placed for me next to a telephone.

I thanked the girl profusely as she murmured the kind words, "Have a good night's sleep, sir". Then before she closed the door after her, she put her head round once again and piped, "If you had held up such a packet in Piccadilly Circus, you'd have been mobbed". Cocky little so-and-so, I thought. But I was right in presuming that if, as is wrongly believed, the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, there must be a way to reach a woman.

Next morning, as soon as the offices in Whitehall began work, I made a telephone call to the Home Secretary's office

and asked to speak to Lord Munster's private secretary. A friendly female voice answered. I told her I had a letter for the Home Secretary from Sir John Colville, whose name she recognised, and asked when I could come over to deliver it. I was told to hold on but within a few minutes she inquired of me if 11.30 that same morning would suit me. I went over at the appointed time. Our meeting became absolutely informal as soon as he read Colville's letter. Lord Munster made inquiries thereafter about India followed by the usual niceties of conversation. Meanwhile his secretary served us coffee and biscuits. Then he said, "Is there anything we can do for you?" That was my chance. I asked if my personal problem of accommodation at the Dorchester could possibly be solved. Lord Munster was most obliging. He called through the open door to the competent young woman who had just served us coffee and told her to assist me with my problem. When I finished talking to Lord Munster, I went over to her. She made the important call to Mayfair 8888 and asked for the Managing Director, Mr. Bon. "This is the Home Secretary's office calling", she announced. The Dorchester's switch-board must have worked swiftly for conversation began once again: "Good morning Mr. Bon. This is the secretary to Lord Munster speaking from the Home Office. We understand Mr. D. F. Karaka, K-A-R-A-K-A-, that's right, has arrived at your hotel. I think he came last night". She spelt out my name once again.

Mr. Bon could not have had a clue who I was. There must have followed a quick search through the names of new arrivals. When the telephone conversation was resumed, I heard Lord Munster's secretary say, "That's right, that is right. We are so glad he is staying at your hotel and it would be appreciated if he could be well looked after. Thank you so much, Mr. Bon".

"Perfect!" I said to the girl, "Absolutely perfect. And if you ever come to India, you can pick the rajah, for whom you wish to work, me included".

I got a cab back to the hotel. It was past the time I was

required to vacate my room. I found out that my bags were already packed and kept with the porter in the basement. The private dining room of the night before had to be made ready for a company lunch. At the Reception desk, everyone was so busy that no one noticed me. Eventually someone half-heartedly uttered a limp 'Yes?'

"When do I have to leave? Please check that for me?" There was precision in my tone of voice.

"Your name, sir?"

I went through it all over again, spelling it out letter by letter.

"Your room number," the assistant asked.

"My room didn't have a number".

At this stage, someone a little better informed took over and asked, "Mr. Karaka?"

"Yes", I said.

"There will definitely be a room for you, sir, but we are not yet sure where it will be".

"Oh", I said with relief.

"You can stay with us as long as you like", added a senior, morning-coated assistant standing by.

"That's very kind of you", I replied.

Later that afternoon when the receptionist of the night before came on duty and noticed me hovering around the enquiry desk, she remarked, "I told you Mr. Bon would surely do something".

"So I see." Upper class Indians keep silent when they have successfully performed the rope trick. By the evening almost everyone in the lobby knew my name and they have known it ever since. One of the night porters confided in me a few days later, "No one knows who you are, but we think you must be important, sir".

"Everyone is important in this world", I retorted.

"That's right sir, that's right", he readily agreed. The sentiments I had expressed were approved of, for he was one of those who voted for Labour at the General Elections.

The diary of my brief stay in London contained an odd mixture of personal, political and journalistic appointments:

Interview with Amery¹, lunch with Ruth Lodge, the actress; broadcast on B.B.C. to America; dinner at the *Ecu de France*; the Orchid Room; dog racing; Lord Munster at the Home Office; the House of Commons with Wing Commander Grant-Ferris; drinks with Michael Foot; Victor Gollancz; Romilly Cavan, the novelist and playwright; the Ministry of Information. That was where the censor's office was located; it was also a telegraph office for our press cables.

My halt in London was brief for I realised I would otherwise be too late for the curtain fall in Europe. The Western Front was beginning to liven up; the final push through was in sight. I left as soon as I could get a seat on a plane and by lunchtime the same day I was at the Scribe Hotel in Paris, the headquarters of the war correspondents accredited to SHAEF Rear.

The Scribe was reserved entirely for us. — Only war correspondents and Information personnel were allowed to stay there. Though an hotel can never be a battlefield, the atmosphere of the Scribe was always tense. There was a guard round the clock, outside the briefing room and where the hand-outs were placed. Until a correspondent was known, there was each time a security check of his identity card before he could enter the briefing room. Correspondents were alerted by sounding a klaxon horn on each floor. It was attached to a buzzer. One buzz signified a new hand-out, two indicated that the handout was important and there were three buzzes for a flash message. The latter was always read out to the correspondents. Flashes were frequent towards the last days of the war. There was such a flash to announce the death of President Roosevelt², who had

¹ Secretary of State for India. It was the only exclusive interview he ever gave on India. Twenty-seven newspapers in India reproduced it on their front-page; Mahatma Gandhi replied to it. ² April 12, 1945.

passed away at Warm Springs in Georgia.

For two whole days I studied the overall position of the war in the map room of the Scribe. Drew Middleton of the *N. Y. Times* was helpful in filling in some blanks for me. My task was different from British and American correspondents, who were busy filing details, the broad picture being already known to their people at home. I was covering the war for an Indian newspaper whose readership was less familiar with the happenings of the last five years and for whom a great deal had to be paraphrased. There was also no antipathy in India to the Germans. The mood of the Indian was anti-British, if at all. I had therefore not only to file messages but make them understood by my readers in India.

Dated March 24, 1945 my first message from SHAEF Rear gave a brief summary of the position as at that date. I said:

All hell has broken loose east of the Rhine. The Ruhr has been in flames and north of it the British Second and the American Ninth Armies have made several crossings on a wide front, sweeping everything before them. Further east airborne troops have been landed successfully, piercing through German resistance like a sharp knife.

The end of the war is well in sight and it is doubtful if Germany can hold out a month from now. For three weeks the Ruhr has been plastered with some of the heaviest allied bombing. Never before has air power been used with such paralysing effect. The concentration of high explosives on six hundred square miles, constituting the Ruhr in a rectangle made up of Duisburg, Dusseldorf, Soest, and Ahlen, has reduced Germany's most vital industrial area virtually to pulp. But the spearhead of recent allied attacks has been further north, avoiding the congested area of the Ruhr. Too much time would have been wasted had the Ruhr itself been the main battleground. It would have meant street fighting and slow progress.

But General Montgomery's decision to land north of

it makes the drive into northern Germany easier to accomplish. The Ruhr can effectively be isolated and neutralised without actually fighting through it. Prior to the Rhine crossings, the north Ruhr area, bounded by Ahaus, Munster, Du!men, Haltern and Wesel, was heavily plastered by allied bombers. Complete devastation was reported with whole towns left burning. Reports reaching here indicate there are little signs of movement in that area. One bomber pilot said he saw 'not a puff of smoke from a single railway engine and no sign of enemy aircraft'. All is quiet on the western front....

Nothing can save the Germans now. The Rhine which was a strong bastion of German defence has been lost by them. Nazi stubbornness which persists in carrying on the fight to the bitter end, is reducing Germany to shambles.

During the operations of the last five days the American Ninth Air Force flew 12,000 sorties to blast enemy communication centres, railroad yards, fortified towns, troops and armour in the Ruhr and the Rhineland alone. This constitutes a most intensive series of attacks since it began operation from Britain in the autumn of 1943. Between bombers and fighter bombers 7,628 tons of bombs have been dropped in this area. Against such overwhelming air superiority and such crushing bombardment from the air, Kesselring¹ can do little. It is just hell let loose and only God can save the Germans from extinction now and even God does not appear to be on their side.

It was about this time that General Patton commanding the U.S. Third Army flashed across the scene and stole the thunder. In twenty-four hours he took some 19,000 prisoners and Patton's ten-day score was 72,000 German prisoners. Thus the end of the war was only a question of time.

Details available at our briefings, always given by an officer of the rank of a full colonel or a brigadier, showed that German tanks, transport, locomotives, gun positions, barges, railway cars and vehicles were being destroyed by the

¹ The German general.

hundreds at a time. Germany was being reduced to rubble. The candle of German resistance was slowly but steadily being extinguished. No single people had taken so merciless a punishment before surrendering.

Then came the news that General Eisenhower had been over the Rhine and on his return the same afternoon¹ he would stop over to see us at the Scribe. The briefing room was packed long before he arrived. The armed guard outside, stood more rigidly at attention than usual. Passes were double checked all through that day. There was a murmur just as he arrived. Within minutes he entered the room and walked between our tables, up to the raised briefing table, on which he leaned. He spoke with his hands clasped. Immaculately dressed in his general's uniform with five little stars worn in a circle on his shoulder strap and with the flash of SHAEF on his sleeve, he looked the perfect supreme commander. His lips were thin and he had a wide sweep of forehead.

We were all silent in that overfull briefing room, waiting to hear him speak. "I would not have you think I have written off this war", he said. "No one knows what the German can do within his own country. He is trying to do everything he can. I believe so far as he is able, the German will stand and fight wherever we find him". That was a gracious compliment to his foe whose courage he did not doubt, belittle or underestimate.

Three-quarters of an hour in the same position, his hands clasped all through his speech, he spoke without a note and without faltering. He combined the polish of an experienced speaker with the vigour of a front-line soldier. He kept emphasising that only one phase of the campaign had ended, not the whole war. The Rhine was a symbol of German resistance. Only *that* symbol was destroyed. He spoke of the crushing defeat his men had inflicted but interleaved his remarks with a cautious note. "I would say the Germans as a military force on the western front are a whipped army,

¹ March 28, 1945.

but that does not mean that a front cannot be formed somewhere else, where our maintenance is stretched to the limit and their defensive means can better be brought to bear. One day I shall be able to tell you that organised resistance in Germany is broken”.

General Eisenhower expressed the view that the Germans would not surrender unconditionally. “It is my honest opinion there will be no negotiated unconditional surrender. It will be an imposed, unconditional surrender”. Thereafter, establishing order would be the problem, “till the Allied governments decide what is to be done with Germany”. He described to us the various plans that were envisaged prior to the Rhine crossing, the main difference of military opinion being between two views: whether the Rhine should be penetrated only at one spot or on a wide front. The former would have given the Germans advance notice of the thrust. The plan finally adopted was completed on February 10, but had to be delayed two weeks as it was realised that it was possible for the Germans to flood the Ruhr. “I confess those were the two most anxious weeks I had”, General Eisenhower said.

He then went on to explain the plan of the battle of the Rhine in detail. He did it with such simplicity that he appeared to be moving armies with the same ease with which a croupier pushes stacks of chips on a roulette table from one number to another. In this battle a quarter million Germans had been taken prisoner. “You can see what a quarter million men would have meant to the German Army if they were available now on the east of the Rhine”. He took no credit for himself, not even that which was due. “Teamwork wins wars”, General Eisenhower said. He also said that in his dictionary there was no such thing as air-support for ground. “It is all one war; ground, sea and air”.

He was brilliant, absolutely brilliant all through his forty-five minute talk, precise to the letter, clear as crystal. When he finished, he pulled out from his hip pocket a packet of Camels and lit one for himself. His ability to relax was

as perfect as his power of concentration. I earmarked this man as being presidential timbre. Americans after the war laughed at me when I carried a frontpage article headed, *'Eisenhower Next U. S. President'*. He did not contest that year but at the next election in November 1952, pitted against Mr. Adlai Stevenson, he romped home. That General Eisenhower did not make as great a President of the United States as I had expected, was another matter.

Belsen

WHILE THE German people knew that the end of the war was near, the authority to surrender vested only in the Nazi high command. For the Nazis a surrender was the rope with which to hang themselves. Their doom was sealed, even at the hands of their own people. Months before the end of the war, Germans began destroying pictures of Adolf Hitler.

While gloom was descending on the Germans, the sap was rising for the French. It was spring in Paris. In the Place de la Concorde¹, the French regiments were being presented by General De Gaulle with their lost colours, which had been hidden away from the enemy during the occupation. In the crypt of the chapel of the Palais des Invalides, a new flame was lit as also over the tomb of the unknown soldier under the Arc de Triomphe. After the presentation of the colours there was a march past which we watched from a window of our hotel². If as an Indian I felt so deeply moved by what I saw, it must have been soul-stirring for the French.

There was a sea of humanity below us; the houses and shops along the avenue were adorned with dangling hordes of people. Only the avenue itself was kept free for the march past, with *gendarmes*³ jealously guarding it from the happy but jostling crowds.

¹ April 2, 1945.
policemen.

² On the Avenue de l'Opera.

³ French

Soon we heard the strains of martial music; it was the music from the days of Napoleon. The crowds quivered with emotion as a posse of Alpine troops in quick, short steps moved briskly to the music of *Sambre et Meuse* dum, da da dum, da da dum, da da da dum — their arms swinging in rhythm. It was a pageant of pomp and medieval beauty adorned with modern military hardware. Dark blue berets were worn cocked on a side of the head, followed by dull green khaki helmets with camouflage netting on them, long great-coats, row after row of Browning rifles slung over the right shoulder, the Moroccans in turbans, the Foreign Legion in white caps, the Republican Guards in their extremely colourful ceremonial uniforms and finally the Goumiets with quaint headgear. The spirit of France, bludgeoned by the Boche, was now revived. Its light was rekindled with the help of their allies — the British, the Americans and many other nations not forgetting the Indian soldiers who spearheaded the attack on Cassino hill. Two Indian Divisions, the 8th and the 10th, were known to every urchin all the way from north Africa through Italy, France and Germany. They were known as the men who pushed through or died. While the soldiers of the other great nations on both sides of the war may have fought tactically greater battles, it was very often the little Indian's prowess in the field, his pure, unadulterated gallantry that captured the hearts of the people in whose lands he fought. The Indian often unable to speak the language of the countries where he was asked to fight pulled through with a smattering of pidgin English. What mattered was that he understood every military command from "Fire" to "At Ease".

I was an Indian with only a pen and not a gun in my hand. Normally that would give me the status only of a *babu*¹. Yet I felt as if I were on a pedestal, much respected by the local people with whom I came into contact. The fact that I was covering the war from Paris, a city which had association with night clubs, champagne and women, did

¹ Word for clerk, used originally in Bengal but now understood all over India to mean the same.

not diminish my understanding of its vital last phase. We were eleven hundred war correspondents accredited to SHAEF at the time and Paris was our headquarters. It was where all the strings were gathered, all the news bulletins and flashes from individual fronts co-ordinated, filtered and analysed and their meaning understood. As I had missed all but the end of the war, I would not have understood what was happening without the live briefings and the plotted positions on maps to which we had free access. Only thereafter could I move into Germany proper.

By now six allied armies were piercing the heart of Germany. The thrusts were so quick and so effective, it was obvious that utter rout would swiftly set in. A sizeable town like Frankfurt-am-Main in the upper Rhineland with a population of over half a million, centre of commerce and industry, was picked up as if it were a raisin in a plum pudding. The Germans were fighting with their last breath.

It was like going to a funeral and feeling tearful even before seeing the corpse as, during the next few days, I moved into the parts of Germany which had just come under allied control. With so much movement every day, I went where the available transport took me. My first entry was at the Belgian border. This area was a gaping wide desolation, with its towns systematically destroyed, wiped out street by street, alley by alley, sometimes even house by house. Not a factory, not a bridge, not a railway was left ungutted. Allied bombers had gone through it with a fine comb. Across and along the Rhine all I could see was crumbled masonry. Naked iron girders made strange patterns against the light blue sky, as if a little boy's Meccano set had been twisted and smashed up by an irate father.

Between industrial towns there were often long stretches of beautiful countryside, green fields with patches of gold

which were mustard crops. A few miles beyond, we would come to another town and again it would be in silent ruins, sombre and grey. Men were few except the old, seen leaning against walls smoking their pipes. The women, wearing black, looked wiry and hardy. The older ones had colour in their cheeks; their white or grey hair was neatly tied. The younger women were not tired despondent or distressed. Many looked positively beautiful. Their bodies appeared hungering for a fond embrace. If only the men would return from the war. Transport and communications had been so thoroughly smashed that no word arrived from anyone anywhere. Yet the young women knew that sometime soon, someone would return from somewhere. The war was lost.

Essen, which we visited was gutted from end to end. Nothing remained untouched by bomb or blast. We halted to look over the Krupp factory, once the pride of German war production, now a mass of twisted iron and powdered cement. At the entrance to that plant, there once stood the statue of its founder, Alfred Krupp¹ who had provided Bismarck with armaments to win the Franco-Prussian war. His successors tried to win the war for Hitler. Alfred's bronze statue, knocked off its base lay in a deep crater in the ground. As I looked down the hole, I saw him clutching his Prussian hat and gloves, his left hand resting with great dignity on his hip. He wore a morning coat and riding boots. His cravat looked somewhat dusty.

We left Krupps and Essen and drove back through the gloom of the Ruhr. Small breadlines now came into sight. There were longer queues to be seen as we went deeper into Germany. Back again across the Rhine, we drove through open country on which the sun shone. On this drive in the direction of the Weser river I saw an old man pushing a little cart. A young boy who could not have been more than seven or eight years of age, was helping him push it. There was a generation between them which was

¹ 1812 to 1887

missing, symbolic of Germany at the end of the war.

The next day I drove to a small town not far from the Weser river. It was on a hill commanding a pastoral view absolutely beautiful to look at. But for the ugly landmarks of war seen over the 175-mile road along which I drove, it would have been difficult to believe that I was so close to the front. The landmarks were unmistakably real. They presented some of the most staggering sights: Haltern, Munster, Osnabruck were in total ruins. Nothing had escaped allied bombing except a few isolated farmhouses on the outskirts of the big towns. The devastation was complete.

Munster was a town where there once had lived 150,000 people. When I reached it at noon there was only one German policeman in sight. He saluted me. It was an ordinary salute; no 'Heil Hitler'. Nobody knew where the people of these three big towns had gone. They had just disappeared. There was no sign of movement in the mangled debris, no evidence of life; not a bird or even a rat was seen. Across the Rhine that morning my eyes fell on the tall chimneys of the Ruhr; there was no smoke in them. The heart of Germany had ceased to beat.

On the gate of a munitions factory in this dead area I read a slogan written in fine old Germanic lettering. "Give me five years and I will give you a different Germany", it said. The words were Hitler's. As the Germans looked upon what was left of their country now, they covered their faces with their hands, partly in shame, partly in horror.

My jeep was stopped in a small town to make way for a stream of trucks bringing back hundreds of German prisoners from the front. The trucks crawled slowly through the little town as in a funeral procession. The women had come out of their battered houses to weep by the roadside as truckloads of their men passed by. Little children looked dazedly at the sad end of their fathers. For the first time, white flags were seen hanging from German houses.

At the sound of planes overhead German women would instinctively look to the skies in fear. When they realised

that the planes were not bombing them, they would walk on.

Somewhere along this sad road I saw a large effigy of Christ on the cross. Little white flowers had grown at his feet, the only evidence of colour in otherwise drab, sombre surroundings. A German woman was kneeling before it, making the sign of the cross. I could not stop my jeep to watch her pray for the signs on the road said, 'Keep moving'.

It was in the next day or two that news came to our hillside press camp that the British second army had taken Soltau. Late that morning I drove out in my jeep, scouting around with no particular objective or destination in mind. There was a driver with me. Although we had road maps, we had lost our sense of direction. Aimlessly we drove past long stretches of green, relieved only by patches of mustard crops. The war and its horrors receded into the background because of the pretty canvas which nature had spread before us. Occasionally the road signs would indicate our whereabouts.

I took over the wheel and drove on, breathing in the cool fresh air of that spring morning. The countryside was beautiful, so different from that which I had seen in the Ruhr.

I kept sniffing the air. Suddenly I got the whiff of a dirty smell. My olfactory nerves had always been sensitive. I sniffed again, and with a sour look on my face, exclaimed to the driver, "Phew! What's this foul smell?" It was like that of a sewer filled with rotting corpses. It was difficult to understand the juxtaposition of the beautiful scenery with the horrid smell. As we drove on, the stench became stronger with the breeze blowing from across the fields. Inexplicable, it seemed to both of us. I put my foot down heavier on the accelerator to get out of this belt of smell. But it continued to surround us. Soon we noticed a road sign, two feet away from the ground. It read: BERGENBELSEN.

"Belsen!" I exclaimed. I had vaguely heard the name. It was the Nazi concentration camp, which the British and

the Americans described as horrible, and the existence of which the Germans denied, saying it was only the vile propaganda of the allies. Many educated Indians were inclined to believe the Germans.

Hurriedly we found our bearings on the map. Bergenbelsen was south-east of Soltau. The camp was tucked well behind trees on the way to Soltau beyond a clearing in the forest. With the zest of having located a place which many believed did not exist, we sped in the direction to which the roadsign pointed. A mile or two later we found a cluster of jeeps and an armoured car, parked outside the grey stone entrance of a lodge.

This was the entrance to Belsen camp. One entered it through a low wooden gate, normally closed with flat iron bars and chains. A British sergeant stood against the stone wall of the lodge, weeping like a child. There could have been a reason for this, for he was a Jew like the inmates of Belsen.

My blue card checked, I was immediately allowed in. Ten guards, wearing cotton pads on their nostrils, showed me into an inner room.

"Open your shirt sir", said a soldier with a gun which pumped out a white powder.

"What's that?" I asked, following his instructions.

"D.D.T." he replied. "The place is typhus ridden".

Although I was inoculated against this fatal disease, added precautions seemed essential. The powder was squirted on to my chest and on my back, then down each leg of my trousers. It was put on my head and rubbed into my scalp.

"There sir, you may now inspect the wonderful handiwork of Mr. Hitler", the British soldier said.

"When did you get here?", I asked.

"Only an hour and a half ago". I realised I was the first of eleven hundred correspondents to enter this or any other concentration camp. "It's 'orrible, 'orrible", I heard another younger soldier say. "I ain't seen anything so 'orrible in

my life". Then under his breath he added, "The bastards, the bloody bastards".

"Easy boy", I said for I realised he was only a kid barely out of school. I moved towards the courtyard of the camp, my handkerchief tied tightly round my nose.

By now I had acquired a guide to show me round the camp. Word had reached the sergeant who was the highest ranking officer in charge that a British war correspondent was on the premises and as it was the British who had liberated the Belsen camp, they were glad to have me with them. As I walked past various rooms which must have been the offices of the camp commandant, my escort halted in front of one of them. In the doorway to this room, a middle-aged woman sat, embroidering a piece of cloth.

"This is a war correspondent, ma'am", he said, gawkily pointing a thumb at me.

"Good afternoon", she looked up and said. "I am happy to meet you". Despite the ordeal she had been through, there was no trace of bitterness in her voice. In her earlier days she must have been stunningly attractive. I stayed a while to talk to her.

She was well born, related to the Governor General of one of the Dominions. She was interned in Belsen because she was married to a German Jew. I took down particulars of her family to inform them that I had seen her, which I did. "It has been a trying experience", she said of the months she was an inmate. The worst I had yet to see for myself.

As I came in sight of the open courtyard which was about an acre in size, I noticed there was not a blade of grass on it. This puzzled me for Belsen was set in beautifully green countryside.

"No grass here", I remarked to my escort.

"No, sir, not a blade. They've eaten it". Then, pointing to the barbed wire fence around the camp, he observed, "if you will see, there is no grass for a whole arm's length all around the camp".

In the courtyard itself it was difficult to tell who was

dead and who was still alive. Bodies, mainly of men, were lying all over the place, face downwards. I saw two young Jews dragging the dead body of a man along the ground with the help of ropes slung over their shoulders. It was an emaciated body, fully clothed, with unmistakable Jewish features and as they dragged it from one part of the camp to another, the dead man's face was bobbing up and down on the ground. It sent a chill down my spine. "Horrible! Horrible!" my escort said. He turned his face away.

Even more horrible than the sights was the stench of Belsen. It was the rule of the camp, ordained by the Nazis, that the inmates of Belsen should live in their own dirt. To fulfil this theory of punishment, there were no lavatories in the camp. Human excreta had to be buried by the inmates themselves at the very spot at which it was produced. A new inmate would dig it deep into the earth to start with but as time passed and he got weaker and weaker, he could not dig deep enough any more. So he lived with it until he died.

I stood amidst this horror looking around. It was difficult to believe man could degrade his fellowmen thus. My escort with his gun slung over his shoulder was by my side. We walked on down a narrow path in the centre of the camp careful to see I trod on no one. Dead and half-dead bodies were littered everywhere. As I walked to the end of the rectangle, I felt a trifle dazed with what I saw. My escort asked me to walk to the extreme righthand corner of the camp. So I did. He could not say much when we got there but twice he put up his right hand, a movement which I did not at first notice. I must have looked puzzled, for finally he broke the silence and said: "Have a look at this." I then realised he was drawing my attention to a pile of dead bodies, entirely naked, lying one on top of the other with only skin covering the bones, mouths open, indicating the state of agony in which they must have died.

The pile stood 8 ft. high. I looked at this sight in total horror, refusing to believe what I saw. My escort pointed in

yet another direction with his other hand: Here also was a similar though higher pile of corpses, with a smaller third pile close-by, about half as high. I would not have believed it, had I not seen it myself. I asked the soldier with me what was the meaning of these piles, and why the dead had been left in this inexplicable manner.

My escort pointed again to two primitive iron cooking stoves. "These were the human crematoriums they used", he replied. "When they ran out of coke, they could not cremate any more".

It was one of the major stories of the war — the eyewitness report of an Indian war correspondent of the first concentration camp that civilised man saw. Later reports, movies and pictures when exhibited, rocked the conscience of the world. Even the German people had wept when they saw what their Fuhrer had done, pleading, "We didn't know".

Yet not a line came from my own newspaper, which surprised me considerably. Uncertain whether my message had passed the military censors and been allowed to reach its destination, I sent a service message to the *Chronicle* to ascertain how my newspaper had reacted to this stunning story which I rated as a masterpiece. Instead of the editor, the proprietor replied. His cable¹, which I received when I returned to the Scribe, read: NAZI HORRORS DESCRIPTION THOUGH GOOD FEEL OVERDONE CHANGE TOPIC UNLESS SOMETHING SPECIAL = CAMA.

Back at SHAEF, the tension eased after the fall of Madgeburg. From then on there was only one order: On to Berlin. From Madgeburg on the Elbe which the armoured spearhead of the U.S. 9th Army had reached, Berlin was only fifty-eight miles away. The Americans

¹ The post-mark, in French, on the cable was of 1 Mai 1945.

who had crossed the Rhine under Field Marshal Montgomery's command now reverted to the command of General Bradley. At Magdeburg the Germans offered resistance, but enough only to delay our entry into Berlin. The other reason for taking time to march into the German capital was tactical; our infantry had to catch up with our armoured spearheads. But everyone was aware it was only a question of time before doughnuts would be served in Berlin cafes and jam sessions of American jazz heard over Berlin radio.

On my return to Paris, I saw the road from Orly airport lined with hundreds of French women, looking noticeably anxious.

"What are they waiting for?" I asked the Frenchman sitting next to me in the airport bus.

"For their men to return from Germany", he replied. "They come like this every evening. They go back when they find no one has arrived and they come again the next day". Then changing over to French in which he could express himself better he added, "*C'est l'espoire, toujours l'espoire.*"¹

Paris was full of rumours. Late on the night of April 28, about 2 a.m. a rumour hit the city that the Germans were surrendering. Another report said that Himmler had announced that Hitler was dying. When SHAEF checked, Washington denied both rumours. That did not stop the local Parisians from celebrating as also American soldiers and sailors on leave in the French capital. From the nearby *Rainbow Room*, a war-time night club, the Americans rushed out in great excitement to check with us whether the news was true. We told them there was no confirmation. This was when one American soldier, exuding fumes of alcohol, said to another, "I guess only Ike would know. Let's go see Ike".

¹ "It is hope, always hope".

But at this point even Eisenhower did not know. Contacted by our press room, he informed us he had heard nothing. It was an hour of expectant anguish. There was little else we could do but wait. So we sat in the big lounge and looked blankly on. Two American sailors strolled into the front lobby of our hotel. They asked the sergeant on night duty whether the war was over. The American sergeant informed them the rumour had just been denied. The two sailors shook their heads. Then one of them made the sign of the cross and walked away. Whether it was the German woman kneeling at the cross somewhere inside Germany or the American sailor on short leave in Paris, everyone seemed to be leaving the date and time of the end of the war to God to decide. We went back to bed with heavy hearts. The war just would not end.

It was the same for the next few days. Nothing would happen in the Scribe hotel for well over two hours, then all of a sudden the buzzer would go off thrice. A flash which followed three toots would indicate a push forward, a big break through or the capture of a well-known Nazi figure. Our armies were steadily creeping forward, yet they seemed unable to end the war. Eisenhower's estimate that it would have to be an imposed unconditional surrender was proving correct.

A little before midnight on May 4, the klaxon horn buzzed three times once again. We knew a flash would be read out in two minutes. From our rooms we rushed down to the main hall to hear the news. We learned that all the German forces in Holland, in northwest Germany and in Denmark including Heligoland and the Frisian Islands had surrendered to Montgomery's 21st Army Group. Good though the news was, it was only a battlefield surrender. The war was still on.

The klaxon tooted three buzzes five different times the next day producing an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation at the Scribe. Those were the most exciting moments of war. No one dared move out of the hotel. It was also the time we worked hardest. The agencies and the radio

networks which catered for spot news were kept so busy, their men had no time to sleep, bathe or shave.

Finally word trickled through that a big story was to break that same night at General Eisenhower's headquarters at Rheims, a hundred miles from Paris. Some twenty of us tried to get there by whatever means we could, using jeeps, taxis, some even drove in trucks. It was a cold night and as the jeep we used, sped across the French countryside, no one, except us, was aware of the importance of our mission. We were going to cover the biggest story of the war, the curtain fall.

We reached Rheims by midnight. There we were told that not all of us could be accommodated in the war room, where the important meeting with the Germans was to take place. The room was too small. It, therefore, had to be a selective group of four or five correspondents from among us, capable of giving the widest coverage who would be allowed into the room. That meant only the agencies and the radio networks. When the leading newspapers of London and New York were kept out of the room, the claims of a newspaper in India would have been too feeble even to press. Quite rightly I made no foolish claim. It was sufficient satisfaction to see the agony of the world end, and to be so close to the biggest newsbreak of the war: surrender by the Germans.

Around 2 a.m. Air Marshal Tedder arrived, sitting erect in an upright Rolls Royce. General Bedell Smith, who was General Eisenhower's Chief of staff followed shortly thereafter, then the Russians and next the French. Finally the Germans arrived, led by General Alfred Jodl, chief of the German staff. Jodl represented Admiral Doenitz and thus he had authority to sign the instrument of surrender.

As we were allowed into the room immediately after the signing of the great document, it was not difficult for us to reconstruct the scene with the help of a few props. At such a time, no one wanted to keep anything exclusively to themselves; all news and even personal observations were freely shared. We saw the unpolished table made of cheap

white wood around which the assembly gathered, the pads, the pencils and the pens. The table was cracked at the top; I was told it was a souvenir, captured from the Germans. A microphone had recorded the proceedings.

Jodl and his escort had arrived at Rheims in a Dakota called Marie Lou II. His plane flew two stars on its pennant. A brigadier met them at the airport and drove them to Eisenhower's headquarters. Salutes were exchanged where necessary, for army men have a discipline which transcends personal likes and dislikes. On arrival at Eisenhower's headquarters, the Nazis asked if they could have a wash. It was perhaps essential they washed off the blood of the innocents at Belsen and the other camps. Then they sat down and signed. The formalities of the surrender were conducted at the level of chiefs of staff with General Bedell Smith representing the allies. General Eisenhower did not take part in the ceremony of surrender. He merely guided it to its natural conclusion.

When the signatures were blotted and the instruments exchanged, Jodl stood up in the war room in which the surrender took place. His voice choked with emotion he said, "With this signature the German people and the German armed forces are, for better or worse, delivered into the victor's hands. In this war which has lasted more than five years, both have achieved and suffered more than perhaps any other people in the world. In this hour I can only express the hope that the victor will treat them with generosity".

So ended the war in Europe with only the sigh of a lonely train in Rheims railway station and the history of the world turned over a new chapter. As I drove back in our jeep, it was dawn. On the outskirts of Paris that bright morning I heard the laughter of little children playing under the clear sky. It was May 5, 1945.

Room 726, St. Regis

THE WAR in Europe had ended. A new feeling of power was beginning to come to me, power to absorb new feelings and emotions, power to express them also. I began to show an interest in the working of fate as opposed to free will, of destiny having a say in the affairs of men. The stars and a horoscope can indicate a *yog* or a trend but the right of the individual to go with or against a trend would always remain his prerogative.

A *yog* for travel must definitely have been in evidence in my horoscope in the middle of 1945, a 'journey across water' as the old Indian *pandits* would have called it. This became evident to me when I decided to move from Europe to the only remaining theatre of war which was the Pacific. The *yog* was helping me every inch of the way. I decided that I should first visit New York and from there move to the Pacific with a new set of introductions collected from a country where I knew absolutely nobody. U.S. army commands had to be contacted on a different wavelength from those which worked with the British.

My priority for travel was always '3' but its value had diminished because of the rush of American officers wanting to cross the Atlantic after the European war. "It will take a fortnight before your turn comes", said the British official in charge of movement control at the Ministry of Information in London. "But do you want to go only by plane?"

"That would be quickest", I replied.

"Come again in two days and keep yourself ready to leave at a moment's notice. I may have another plan laid on for you".

"Okay", I contentedly said, in the lingo of the new continent to which I was proceeding. The British official had given me hope of an early move. He seemed anxious to help.

Two days later I called on him as he had said I should. "Well, what has my friend thought up for me?" I asked.

"Oh, we have done a bit of thinking and your stars seem good. If they hold out till tomorrow, you'll be in New York pretty soon". He moved his chair forward and in an undertone informed me, "The *Queen Elizabeth* leaves the day after tomorrow from Greenock.¹ It gets to New York in five days. This ship is leased to the U.S. but we keep a cabin in it for ourselves. This is in case someone important from our side wants to travel by sea. So far no one has asked for it and I would rather give it to a friendly Indian than to another American".

"The *Queen Elizabeth*! Phew! But what will it cost?"

"Only ten pounds. It's less than your air fare," he replied.

"You must be joking".

"I am not. If you want the accommodation, it is yours. I will issue a movement order immediately".

Within minutes I was out of the Ministry with a valuable document in my hand. I went across to the steamship company, paid my fare and collected my ticket.

"There you are, sir", said a friendly female who handed over my ticket to me. "I hope you have a very pleasant journey".

"Thank you, but could you, on the model of this ship, point out where my cabin will be?"

"You have nothing to worry about, sir. It's the best cabin there is — a two-berth cabin on the sun deck". Then in a whisper she volunteered the information, "It's normally reserved for Mr. Churchill".

¹South-west Scotland.

It seemed as if Neptune had moved into my horoscope. I crossed the Atlantic with General Devers who commanded the U.S. 52nd Division, across the passage way. We shared an armed guard between us. I intended only to be in transit on this first trip to America. But I did not get to the Pacific for the last phase of the war. The blast over Hiroshima silenced all.

As we arrived at New York harbour, the launches were blowing their sirens as they tugged us in. Being my first visit to the United States it felt as if the Statue of Liberty had stepped down to receive me. I was so imbued with the principles of justice and liberty that I was ripe for such a reception — Dicey's *The Rule of Law*, Halsbury's *Laws of England*, Justinian's Roman Law, Salmon on Jurisprudence, hundreds of judgments delivered by Blackburn C.J., Cockburn C.J. and a number of other great justices of England's High Court of Judicature. Learning jurisprudence is like learning to ride a bicycle: you need to learn it only once. Thereafter it comes naturally to you.

With the zest of a young crusader I felt the early urge to study, though not to meddle in, the unequal settings noticeable in America's social scene. I had once believed that America had only one prejudice and that it was colour. But later, I noticed pockets of discrimination against the Jews, against Asiatics, against Latins — against all those who could be segregated. These were the late arrivals on the new continent after the first shipload of Pilgrim Fathers had landed from the good ship *Mayflower* on its maiden voyage from Plymouth in England's Dorsetshire to the shores of the new world. Some subsequent whites whose complexions were pinky-white were accepted as original pilgrims with retrospect effect.

At a certain well-known night-club in New York frequented by affluent society, I witnessed such a juggling

of class and caste. The head-waiter sat the new diners and dancers on the opposite side of the dance floor if they did not appear to be descendants of the original pilgrim species. The tables on the near-side of the dance floor were reserved for approved breeds. Inexplicably, however, I was made to sit from the beginning on the correct side of the floor because someone in the management, aware that I had come from India, had concluded I must be a *maharaja*. Titles, however foreign, backed up by the presumption of a bank balance, helped one socially in the United States. It mattered little that the fortune may have been spent, lost, misplaced or frozen. But these were ratings which held good only in frothy circles; they were not representative of the real America.

Admittedly there was another impressive side to this melting pot of communities. It was noticeable that power emanated from a common nationality which echoed with the words, "I am American". It meant something to the person who uttered these words, for they stood for the right to protection in any part of the world. When required, that powerful protection could translate itself into action.

A concept of pride in nationality came to me from Toni Rosetti, a swarthy American with a distinct Italian accent. He was a G.I. travelling with me on board the *Queen Elizabeth*. He wore the large letters 'M.P.' on the sleeve of his shirt, indicating he was military police.

"But don't you feel you are Italian really?" I asked him.

"That make no difference. All is equal in America. No difference", he emphasised.

"But, Toni, how do you become an American with such an Italian accent?" I said provokingly.

"Look mister, accent don't mean nothing, see", Toni replied with slight irritation. "Once you get your papers, you are American. You stand on your constitutional rights. My father came from Italy. But I was born in America, so America belongs to me, see. Any guy who says it don't, I punch his nose".

"Have you ever seen Rome?" I asked Toni.

"Naaw. But it ain't nothing like Nooyork".

"I think you should see St. Peter's, the Sistine Chapel, the Capitol..."

"We got a Capitol too. In Washington. It cawst plenty".

"But you wouldn't get the same feeling. You wouldn't be able to look over the Palatine and see Rome on the seven hills or hear the echoes of Cicero's speeches".

"Look mister", Toni firmly replied. "That's a lot of mush. Don't mean nothing to me. These Italians talk".

Side by side with pride in nationality, an insular tendency was noticeable in Americans even after their involvement in World War II. It was a remarkable achievement that President Roosevelt had, in the face of the Munroe doctrine, brought his people into the larger community of the world to share the responsibility of keeping freedom alive wherever it had been threatened.

Hitherto America's role in international affairs was best symbolised by a little cup or saucer put out on a chair at the entrance to the little churches in the countryside. At the end of a Sunday service the cup would collect dimes, quarters, maybe even an odd dollar which went to feed the hungry people of Chiang's China. That so large a chunk of sympathy as well as aid went down the drain of maladministration and corruption, that China's massive population of over six hundred million turned communist overnight and that the Generalissimo the protege of the U.S. had to take refuge in an island off the mainland, was a major miscalculation of the 1930's. It is the waste that hurts even to watch, like watching a kindly brewer carelessly spilling beer from his overful barrel into the empty mugs of the poor parishioners.

It was in the briefing room of the Scribe hotel in Paris soon after VE¹ day, that I realised America was not paying sufficient attention to the problems which were to crop up after the war had ended. The briefing that day related to

¹ 'Victory in Europe'.

U.S. plans after victory. American correspondents were anxious to know how soon the boys would be back home. The U.S. command had already announced that this was a priority item and that there would not be a moment's delay. The British and the French were saying much the same thing though less positively. Only the Soviets remained silent on the subject of pulling out of the positions they occupied. The Russians were in Berlin; they occupied East Germany; they were sprawled across eastern Europe. When would they pull out of other people's countries? No one asked them that vital question and the Soviets volunteered no information. It struck me then, although I was only a lone Indian correspondent in the briefing room, that the Americans, brilliant though they had been in tactical warfare, would lack the follow-through to hold the peace, for to achieve this would require the tenacious pursuit of aggressive peace-time propaganda. This view of mine is not written with hind-sight. These observations were contained in my despatches from SHAEF to my newspaper in India.

The U.S. did produce an individual Senator McCarthy, in whom were crystallised the alarms and warnings of the upsurge of communism. He revealed an acute awareness of the dangers of Soviet espionage which was steadily gaining a foothold in the democracies, even penetrating the secret cells of nuclear research. But a Senator McCarthy was not the basic need of the American people at war's end. What seemed of greater importance was a broad-based education in the world's problems, its needs, bearing in mind that America could not, ever again, live behind the *boorkha*¹ of the Monroe Doctrine. It should have been obvious to Republican as well as Democratic administrations that in the reshuffle of the balance of power in Europe which was bound to follow the total destruction of the old Prussian war machine, some safeguards would be essential to ensure that the totalitarianism of Soviet communism would not seep

¹ The black, over-the-head garment worn by very orthodox Muslim or Arab women to screen their body and face from male view.

through to fill the vacuum left by the fascism which was destroyed at such heavy cost to the allied world. But this was a man's job and running home to mum and dad by the first available ship was not the right way to face the dangers of Soviet expansionism which loomed large on the face of Europe. The foresight of Roosevelt did not filter through to his successor, Harry Truman, nor could Clement Attlee don the mantle of Winston Churchill. Only the Russians plodded on with their K.G.B.¹ and G.R.U.² steadily planning the subversion of the democratic world and planning also to win the third world war without firing a shot.

Infiltration and sabotage were to be the U.S.S.R.'s most effective weapons. All that the Soviets needed was a new target. That target was the weakened countries of Europe, some with unstable governments. Britain was impoverished and much battered; France had lost face with the occupation; a whole heap of smaller countries in Europe were ripe for plucking. Only America remained, distant, aloof and impregnable.—Soviet policy aimed to isolate it from the mass of new sovereign states which were cropping up in the U.N. like rabbits in an unsupervised warren. The Soviets must appear to them as a peace-loving people. Soviet propaganda was commissioned into action to produce such a result.

The U.S., on the other hand, concentrated too much on producing a post-war economic boom and other issues had therefore to be shelved by U.S. administrations. Despite valiant attempts to remain aloof, the U.S. repeatedly became involved. Each involvement produced a stalemate or a set-back because America after the war hesitated to take a sledge-hammer decision. Democracy has this weakness, that it feels it must give a fair chance to leftists and communists to state their case, despite the known fact that in a communist state no one is allowed to express a contrary opinion. The record shows over and over again, from

¹Komitet Gosudartsvenna Bezabasnosti (Committee of State Security). ²Chief Intelligence Directorate of the Soviet General Staff.

Jakarta to Cairo to Tripoli to Prague that a communist state can never be voted out of power. Only by a student uprising as in Indonesia or a revival of religious fervour as with Sadat in Egypt and Gaddafi in Libya can a communist clique which has muscled in be ousted. But no one was willing to hear the language of violence in the peaceful post-war America of Harry S. Truman, much less in my own country, the land of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, where everything was going to be conquered by love.

The fold-up of the war and VJ¹ day, came while I was still at the St. Regis hotel, situated at the corner of 55th Street, with Fifth Avenue.

It was a difficult hotel to get into. I arrived not too elegantly dressed, riding next to a portly female driver in the front seat of a Red Cross ambulance. Seeing me looking lost on the wharf below the *Queen Elizabeth*, this good woman kindly offered to drive me into town. The St. Regis was not out of her way, she informed me. As the ambulance pulled up at the front door of the hotel, a uniformed porter helped me, unload my bags.

"Going anywhere, sir?" he asked, after the suitcases were on the pavement beside him.

"In there", I replied pointing to his hotel.

He looked surprised at my remark, but confidently replied, "Very good, sir. I'll have the bags sent up as soon as I have your room number".

This time I had to tackle a male 'room clerk' pronounced in America to rhyme with 'irk'. Silk stockings would not have been his line in hosiery even if I had another pair of the sheerest variety. I did produce a letter of introduction to the hotel manager from an Indian prince belonging to

¹ Victory in Japan.

a 'native state'¹ in northern India, the youngest son of the old maharaja. The prince had stayed at this hotel. The room clerk felt the need to take it over to higher authority. But the answer, though couched in polite and profuse regrets was that no accommodation was available. I had given them no intimation of my arrival.

"May I ask who you are?" I inquired of the hotel official who spoke to me.

He whipped out his card on which his designation appeared: assistant manager. As it was not the official to whom the letter was addressed, I inquired very politely, "Would it be possible for me to have a word with the manager himself?"

"I am afraid the answer will be the same". By a quirk of fate, from his own room the manager himself emerged.

A four-piece stand-up conference followed in the passage way. The lower officials briefed the manager so well that I soon realised that regrets would be repeated once again. The manager tried to phrase his regrets even better than the others. His intention was obviously to make a young man in uniform feel important before turning him away. "What my assistant manager has told you is quite correct. We do not have a room free. Otherwise it would have been *our* pleasure".

I said nothing. Five days of travel by Britain's newest luxury liner, a two-berth cabin which only a Churchill or a Roosevelt would rate, the sun deck of the *Queen Elizabeth* while a whole U.S. division was crammed into bunks on the decks below and now no room at the St. Regis in New York. Such a zig-zag pattern of luck did not seem possible. I felt there should be some luck left over for me from the last throw.

¹ The kingdoms of the Indian princes were known as 'native states'.

The seconds moved swiftly, even though they seemed to take an age. I still said nothing. Perhaps with disappointment, speech had dried up in me. The manager broke the silence by adding a few comforting words, "Do you know, sir, whom I had to refuse only this morning?" It was a rhetorical question. "A judge of the Supreme Court", he added.

I looked at him and softly I asked, "How many judges are there of your Supreme Court?" My question produced consternation in the hotel hierarchy.

"How many judges?!?", the manager stuttered. He turned to his assistant and asked, "How many judges are there of the Supreme Court?"

The assistant manager did not know and certainly the room clerk had no clue.

"Let me tell you", I said. There are sixteen judges of the Supreme Court of the United States". I went on, "And how many Indian war correspondents have you known come to your country?" In the silence that followed I said, "One, only one".

The manager was a charming person. He turned to his two subordinates and said, "See that a room is found for this gentleman—the first one which becomes available today". Then he bowed to me most affably and disappeared into his office. I may have had to wait a while, but when I went up in the elevator to my room on the seventh floor, No. 726, I soon became aware that the manager's V.I.P. rating went with the room. The service was perfect. The waiter who served me my first drink of bourbon, a good-sized measure of *Old Grandad*, with cubes of ice, proudly informed me, "My son is a major in the U.S. Army".

I replied, "While I am here, allow me to call you 'colonel'." He beamed with joy. He liked these Indians who were snake charmers.

So began my first visit to the United States of America, a visit intended to be in transit, but which lasted six whole months.

The first man I spoke to in the streets of New York was a negro. It happened soon after I had unpacked and installed myself in my room. I decided to stroll down Fifth Avenue, one of the main thoroughfares of this big city. It was a Saturday in summer and all the shops were closed.

I saw this tall, lanky southern gent slouching down the Avenue towards me, a classic yeah-man and whoodat type. He had gold in his teeth. His lips stood out from his great big jaw. He had a primitive expression which only an Epstein could have captured. There was a look of vacant grandeur on his face. He was humming a Harlem melody. Aware though I was of the name of this well-known avenue, I began conversation with him with the words, "Excuse me. But am I on Fifth Avenue?"

My question started a train of thought in an otherwise relaxed mind. He looked around and took his bearings. Then he confirmed, "Yeah man, this sho is Fiff Avenue. Where dya wantta go?"

"Fifth Avenue", I said.

"Well you don't have to go far. You're right on Fiff Avenue".

"You see, I am a stranger here", I volunteered in order to keep this fascinating conversation going.

"Dat's orright. No trouble at all".

I then announced I came from India.

"You don't say", was his comment.

"And it's a long way from here", I added.

"Whoodat?" He leaned forward to indicate he had not quite understood what I said.

I repeated, "India is a long way from here".

"Yeah. Must be".

"What do you think of India?" I finally asked, seeking some reaction.

He pushed his brown felt hat away from his forehead.

He scratched his head to stimulate thought. "Yindia", he exclaimed, "yeah".

"Well, what do you think of India?" I persisted.

He thought a little more. Finally he replied, "Never did think of Yindia. I guess it's okay — if you say so". Then he strode away.

I met several other interesting people on that first trip. They varied from that brilliant New York lawyer, Congressman Emanuel Celler to the fashionable milliner Fred of John Fredericks whose extravagant hats were the rage of American women. I was, therefore, not sorry that my onward trip to the Pacific was cancelled. I was glad to halt for a while in America to study the New World and meet its friendly people.

Relieved of war reportage, I began to assume the role of interpreting India to the Americans. I believed this was a mission I had to perform, a belief that has stuck to me ever since. The only thing I lacked was an audience. I looked for one wherever I went.

Emanuel Celler had a natural sympathy towards my country. He had a vague interest in our fight for freedom and the issues that arose from that struggle. But while his legal mind could apply itself to any problem, his heart was always with his own people. He was wrapped up in Israel. He had told Roosevelt at the time of a presidential election, "You cannot become President of the United States unless you carry the State of New York; you cannot win New York State unless you carry New York City; and you cannot win New York City without the Jewish vote". That was Celler's forte. What time could he have had left for India? He had time for me however. When later, on that trip, I felt that the end of the world had come for me over a purely personal matter, Celler was generous with his time and his counsel.

I was therefore on the look out for a big name connected with or interested in Asia. I thought I had found it in Pearl Buck who wrote *The Good Earth*. She had at the time a big name and commanded a lot of influence in

America. I had first met her husband, Richard Walsh, the publisher. Thereafter I was asked over to tea in their New York apartment. I thought this was the right time to plug my theme which was the need for a correct understanding between the U.S. and India. I had ideas on how it could be achieved. But while everyone agreed there was the need, no one made any further move in that direction. On this subject, the American normally reacted with a complaint: he did not think India was sufficiently interested in the United States.

Pearl Buck reacted differently however. Delicately sipping her cup of China tea, she asked me, "How would you suggest it can be done?"

"If America wants to be understood in India, it must first start understanding India", I replied. India is illiterate, I argued. India reacts emotionally, not rationally. American interest in India would be evidence of its friendliness. That is what is most required. The Indian then becomes receptive to America's viewpoint, which needs to be put out only in tabloid form thereafter.

As I noticed some interest being evoked in my opinions, I went on, "Let some of us younger men interpret India to you. Our country can produce something more than snake charmers, naked fakirs, the rope trick and maharajas on bejewelled elephants".

For a fleeting moment, I thought a spark had flashed, for her next question was: "In what way could I help?"

It was the moment I had waited for, a moment just to be understood. Believing that I was speaking to a great mind already so familiar with a similar problem in China, I enthusiastically said: "Get me Carnegie Hall, Miss Buck".

"Carnegie Hall!" she repeated, in utter shock. She must have thought I was off my head. The symbolism was lost. Perhaps my answer was inappropriate for an occasion which was not as big as I thought it was. But there ended my first attempt to find an audience.

The Good Earth and the words of its well-meaning author did very little when the new wave of Chinese communism

swept over the mainland. Good fiction her book will always remain but lasting friendships between countries and peoples must rest on a different understanding of each other. If that understanding does not come naturally, it has to be fostered. It may even have to be artificially created, though not faked, until in time the two peoples begin to realise their common interest. If the differences still remain fundamental they can at least co-exist. But large countries like China and India must never be allowed to slip into the orbit of the Soviet Union. That would be criminal negligence on the part of the U.S. On that point, I was very clear.

Although aged thirty-four, mentally and physically fully developed, bristling with the zeal to do something for my country and my people, I came out of America a 'mixed-up kid'. I had met an American girl, Vassar-educated, from Milwaukee.

It was in a Florel hat I first saw her. Chance had brought her to our table that night. We seemed to have come from the far corners of the world to find each other, though at that moment it was only the meeting of a man and a woman. That was how we met. That evening I once ruffled her hair.

I knew we would meet again. It was written in the book of words, for we spoke a common language and belonged to one world. Together we found peace. The world seemed ours to hold.¹

There were two bodies aching to become one, two minds which were splinters of the same thought. I will not linger over this phase overmuch for I wrote this hurt out of my system with a book, published in New York and called *I've Shed My Tears*.

¹ *I've Shed My Tears*

The root of the hurt was the burnished colour of my skin. Yet, ironically I come from pure Aryan stock, for the Parsi in India is the original Persian before the Arab invasion, some twelve hundred and fifty years ago. Apart from its known antiquity of Persian culture and civilisation, my race is ethnologically one of the original whites, when the only American in the United States was a Red Indian.

I've Shed My Tears was generously reviewed. It made page three of the N. Y. Times' literary supplement; it rated a column in the Herald Tribune. The description of my moment of defeat reads as poignantly now as when it jabbed through my heart:

It was a Monday evening around 9 o'clock, October 1945. I was wearing my uniform of a war correspondent and as I walked to the corner towards Park Avenue, I felt my beret limp in my hand. It was the cap I had worn in many a theatre of war.

I thought of what I had lost that day: I had lost my faith in a new world; I had lost heart. My self-respect was gone; my pride as a man was hurt.

Only pride of race remained.¹

There followed the struggle to return to India. Money ran short. I had to borrow Rs. 4,000² from my newspaper proprietor for my air fare home, a loan which through most difficult days I had to repay with interest.

On my return to India³ my mother said, "What's happened, son? You are a shadow of yourself". Then as if she were mending the bent and broken pieces, she added, "Soonamai was inquiring after you".

It did not look as if there was a benevolent star anywhere in my horoscope at the time. Saturn was causing havoc; Venus which has emerged with so much enthusiasm was content to go to bed; Jupiter the only shield I ever had, was battered in the process of protecting me. Mars, my own star, seemed to be fighting on the other side.

It was, however, comforting to look into Soonamai's

¹ Ibid.

² Then £ 300

³ December 1945.

dark brown piercing eyes as she stood at the doorway which separated the prayer room from the rest of her apartment. She had moved from her humble bungalow in Byculla to a flat which faced the Arabian Sea on Marine Drive which when lit up at night was called the Queen's Necklace. A luscious sea-breeze blew in from the west.

Soonamai had come out of her inner room that day especially to see me. She wore a white chiffon *sari* with an old-style, *petit point* border. I went up to her and with folded hands bent down to touch her feet. This is the orthodox India way of paying respect to an elder. It is not an everyday greeting but it is used when going on a long journey or returning from one.

"I have a lot to tell you, *mai*", I said.

"Yes", she replied. "So I hear from your mother. But all your aches and pains are sure to go".

With these few words, she went back to her room.

At times I wondered whether there was any justification for the relief I felt in Soonamai's presence. By now the list of those who leaned on Soonamai had considerably grown. The power to get help from this powerful though unidentifiable spiritual force, Soonamai repeatedly stressed, was still in the oil lamp — the *divo* as she called it — which she lit every day to the mysterious saint through whom she had obtained the gift of helping others. But a flickering lamp could only be figurative; the clear words which came from *mai* herself seemed more reliable guidelines to those like myself who were so frequently groping.

In order to accommodate the numbers of people each of whom had problems of their own, all our questions first went to Tehmi. They were written out on a piece of paper in English or in Gujarati.¹ When Soonamai sat in prayer, the image of a thin-faced man would appear in the charcoaled palm of Tehmi's hand. Tehmi would read out all the questions asked. The image would then disappear, indicating, "I will go and see". Later the image would

¹ An Indian language.

re-appear and give the answers, one by one.

I started to frame my questions: Would there be a sudden turn in my arrested love affair? Would she come out to India? Would I go back to the United States? Would there be a reunion? Would continuity be resumed from the point at which it was so abruptly broken? My questions, all on the same theme, left enough room for vagueness in reply. The more nebulous the answer, the less painful it would have been to me. But when some two days later I started to take down the words of reply, I was given not a flicker of hope. I was asked to turn my mind to my work and to the future that lay ahead of me. Moaning over New York would be a waste of my time, I was emphatically told. The idea that I should write a book was approved of. There was also no harm in dedicating it to her as I intended to do. "The episode is dead, It cannot be re-activised", were the last words of the answer I took down.

Shattering it was at the time. I tried to turn and twist the words of the answer which came partly in English, partly in Gujarati. Conversation with spiritual powers can be multilingual. Invariably also, in the answers given, there can be a word or a phrase which has meaning only for the person asking the question. Soonamai with all her powers and Tehmi so involved in this process, had no time to look for some hidden meaning if the individual did not choose to interpret its significance to them. The rule governing the use of such powers was that a man or a woman's personal secrets should not be revealed to others, not even to a person such as *mai*, who worked so hard to get the answers. The function of spiritual power is not that of a crime detection agency, it was repeatedly stressed to us.

I got down to work on my new book: I advertised for a part-time stenographer. A nice little youngster applied for the job; with her I finished the book in eighteen months. I gave a cocktail party to celebrate publication day. Some ninety friends were invited. The invitation card began with the words, "In anticipation of the royalties of his new book, Mr. D. F. Karaka requests the pleasure of the company

of...". There were twenty-three regrets but on the evening of the party one hundred and seventeen people turned up. When the last guests at my cocktail party left, it was almost four o'clock in the morning.

A firm of booksellers in Madras had ordered 30,000 copies of my book. Many thousands were sold in the normal way, but they had obviously over-ordered. One day I received a colourful direct mail leaflet from the booksellers who announced they were offering a free, locally made fountain pen to every buyer of my book. My ego, I must confess, was punctured.

16

First smell of incense

IN THE June of 1947 I was on my way to Delhi. The partition of India into the two dominions of India and Pakistan had just been announced by Lord Mountbatten, Viceroy and Governor General of India. Independence was on the way. The hub of political activity was in Delhi. Jinnah was there, basking in his triumph; he had got the British to agree to his idea of partitioning India so that a part of the country would become a separate homeland for the Muslims. The Indian team of Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel was getting into stride. Only Mahatma Gandhi seemed to be moving out of the political picture. With his life's work done, he let others scramble into the new seats of power. Gandhiji did not want a bed in Viceroy's House; he was content with the power to influence men and events. His one great moment, oneness with his Maker, was yet to come.

I travelled by train to Delhi by the Frontier Mail. On my way to the railway station, I called in at my parents' house. As was customary in our family, I bent down to touch their feet. Mother garlanded me with tuberose buds. I removed the garland and placed it on her prayer table, where there was a sandalwood carving of Zoroaster, a porcelain image of the laughing Buddha, a cross with Christ outstretched, an image of the Virgin Mary, Laxmi the Hindu goddess of wealth, Ganesh the boy god with the trunk of an elephant as his face, and pictures of Muslim saints and

shrines with Arabic writing on them. In terms of my mother's attitude to religion, though liberal in form yet deep in its faith, I was classed as a heathen then. She was, however, not troubled about what others did. If you felt like saying a word of prayer at her table in the corner, you were welcome to do so. If not, she was not concerned.

She had two small envelopes in her hand that afternoon. One was the usual packet of eleven rupees, consisting of a ten-rupee currency note and a silver one-rupee coin; this was given to me for good luck on my trip. With the other, she paused and said: "Will you do something for me in Delhi?"

"Of course", I replied without hesitation.

"But it's not exactly the sort of thing you normally do".

"If it's for you, I'll do anything, go anywhere, deliver anything".

"You see", she explained, "some years ago when I was in Delhi, I called at a *dargah*¹. It's the tomb of Nizamuddin Aulia. I want you to deliver this envelope. Any taxi driver will take you there". She repeated his name, adding that she had written it on the envelope lest I forget it. "When you go there, ask for the head man who tends to the shrine. He is called the *mujawar*. He has just sent me a postcard telling me it is nearing the time of the *Urs*".

Urus as it was pronounced . . . *mujawar* . . . *dargah*, all these words belonged to a language strange to me. I listened to her instructions carefully. "*Urs*", she said is the anniversary of the saint buried there. They celebrate it by feeding the poor each year. Anyway, give this to the *mujawar*; it only contains twenty-one rupees, all I can afford just now". It would be done as she wanted, I told her.

"And if you say 'a prayer for yourself', she added, "sometimes it is heard". I indicated with a nod that her advice had registered even though I did not believe in the existence of spiritual forces or supernatural powers.

Schooled in Oxford, there were for me only four ways

¹ Muslim place of worship, usually where a saint is buried.

of life at the time — liberalism, which I thought was good but it seemed to be dying out; conservatism, which was reactionary as far as India and its freedom were concerned, an "ism" full of empire-builders and those who held on to empires; socialism which, like the Oxford Group movement, was pious but impractical, and communism which sooner or later preached revolutions. Prayers did no harm but they were unnecessary. Even so, to please her, I would bow my head anywhere although my creed even then was summed up in the words of William Ernest Henley's poem:

"In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed".

The hero I was looking for was a man with a clear head, a logical mind, an inherent sense of feeling for the fundamental principles of justice, a man who was a believer in democracy, an upholder of the rule of law, one who could think, feel and live up to the essence of equality which was in Lincoln's Gettysburg speech. Above all, my hero had to have the power of expression. A great speech to me was music in those days just as much as Beethoven, Mozart and Bach. For relaxation, I would look for a woman who could curve into my frame while dancing cheek to cheek, sinew to sinew, impulse to impulse. But for mother's sake I would go to this tomb, the name of which I forgot by the time I came down the stairs. But I knew that the particulars were carefully written on the envelope with clear instructions on how to get there. To Central Station I rushed, to catch the Frontier Mail.

Delhi's political scene was buzzing with activity. As independence was assured, there was a queue for the plums of office which were in the process of being distributed. No one among the Indian leaders had any time to see me.

It was a scene of ambitious politicians claiming the right to play dramatic roles and from among themselves attempting to do the final casting. Mahatma Gandhi had given a clear directive that Nehru was to be his political heir.

That gave Sardar Patel only the second lead. There would have been chaos in the country if the relative political strengths of Nehru and Patel had ever been put to the test. Nehru was undoubtedly the glamour boy the nation would have chosen, but the Sardar also had a great following. Older in years and less polished than Nehru, he had a ruthless, matter-of-fact approach to the problems which he was asked to tackle. Those who were in the administration at that time were able to distinguish between the man of glamour and the man of steel. It was, however, Patel's decision that the wishes of the Father of the Nation should be respected and unhesitatingly he took second place in the victory parade and allowed Nehru to unfurl the flag and take the international bow. 'Leather tough' is what Sardar Patel was called. That was a compliment to him in a setting soaked in froth and embellished with a great deal of flowery verbiage.

The real values of our national leaders were not so evident on the eve of Independence. Many were still adopting attitudes of obstruction when the British were getting ready to quit. Not many believed that freedom would come in their lifetime. Most of our freedom fighters, some genuine, some imaginary, who expected to die only as martyrs found themselves overnight in high, ornately-carved, plush chairs as Ministers or Deputy Ministers in portfolios like housing, community development and transport, subjects to which their approach was as naive as that of a village schoolteacher to the problem of national education. But the thrill of being a free nation far outweighed our lack of immediate ability to govern ourselves. We believed it would all adjust itself in time.

I had two interesting though not necessarily important interviews on this Delhi trip. The first was with General Lord Ismay, a personal friend of Churchill, who despite

the latter's dissuasion, had come out to India as advisor to Mountbatten. Ismay had taken part in all the behind-the-scene discussions that led to the declaration of Independence. In seeing Lord Ismay there was the added attraction of having my first and only glimpse of Viceroy's House before it was termed Rashtrapati Bhavan and became the official residence of the President of India. It was quite an impressive and stately mansion designed by Lutyens the architect who built modern Delhi. I walked past flunkies in long red and gold-crested uniforms, through various corridors and conference rooms on whose walls hung portraits of Viceroys and Vicerines long since dead, till I came to Ismay's oak-panelled study.

I observed:

"General Lord Ismay, D.S.O., K.C.B., C.H., etc., etc., etc., typified the British ruling class. He had an impressive presence, a fine military bearing, his features were strong and rugged. He was an odd mixture of soldier, aristocrat, bulldog and gentleman. His blond, bushy eyebrows were like those of the American labour leader, John L. Lewis. His face was full of character, round and Churchillian in its emphasis. He wore a dark brown civilian suit that morning, a beige silk shirt and a knitted tie. He looked a perfect English gentleman, as tailored by Hawes and Curtis".¹

From my hour and a half's talk with Ismay, I gathered that the main reason which prompted Britain to give India its freedom was the war. Ismay was of the opinion that, among other factors, the part played by the Indian soldier in the war had a great bearing on the change of British public opinion in India's favour. The question, therefore, whether India was ready to govern herself or not was not relevant in terms of the new outlook which ranked freedom and democracy above all practical considerations. The only point of difference was the form the transfer of power should take. The Hindu majority wanted the British to

quit and leave the Indians to settle Mr. Jinnah's demand for partition thereafter. The Muslim minority said: "Divide and then quit". As history records, Mr. Jinnah won his point and a two-pronged Pakistan was created, one part in the north-west of India with Karachi as its capital, the other in East Bengal with Dacca as the central city.¹

Ismay told me he did not favour partition. "I told Jinnah", he said, "the army has but one heart, one pair of lungs, one mind". But Jinnah was unyielding in his demand. According to Lord Ismay, the three-way discussions between the British, the Indian National Congress and Jinnah 'appeared futile and hopeless'. Then the idea of creating two sovereign dominions came up. "It seemed the only way out", was Ismay's comment.

But all that is history now; it was already a *fait accompli* even then. I recorded after my long talk with Ismay that to Mountbatten's lead he played "a brilliant supporting role".

"Here was a man", I said in *Betrayal*, "more convinced than I that my country would have a future and that its people were now on the right path to democracy and freedom and all those glorious ideals for which they had fought for over a quarter of a century. I did not share that conviction, for I was afraid of men changing when power came into their hands".

The rest of my noting in the same book after I left him was interesting. I said:

As I left him and walked back through the long vista of corridors, I looked up once more at the pictures that hung from the walls. There was a mustiness about that big house around which Lutyens built the city of New Delhi. There was also a hollowness about the place and the tread of my feet echoed in the empty rooms. It looked as though someone was leaving.

I stopped and turned to the Indian flunkey escorting me through the maze. "What does this *swaraj* mean to you?"

I asked him. He giggled shyly and said he did not know. Then he ventured: 'Gandhiji will probably come here to live'.

'Would you like that?' I asked him, for he had lived there through many Viceroyalties.

He was not sure. 'I don't think I'll get so much pay. And my uniform — that may have to go. *Khaddar* uniforms don't look good. The British made the best uniforms. My golden *pugree* is much better for a sepoy than a Congress topee'.

He walked up to the taxi with me, *salaamed* me with a sheepish grin on his face, looked round to see whether anyone was watching, and whispered: '*Bakshish* for freedom?'

First things first even in free India, I thought to myself. I gave him a rupee.

My other interview was with Mohamed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. The Muslims now called him their *Quaid-E-Azam*.¹ I had first met Jinnah in 1938 in his Bombay house on Little Gibbs, Road, Malabar Hill, when his position was not much different than that of a back-bench Churchill whom no one took seriously. Lesser men than he in the Congress party were inclined to mock at him until he arrived at the moment of his triumph, with Pakistan accepted as a pre-condition to the transfer of power both by the British Government and by those whom Mr. Jinnah called 'Hindu leaders'. His "day of deliverance", the phrase he coined, had arrived.

The Jinnah I earlier knew tended to plead for recognition of his cause. At my first meeting with him he frequently referred to the justness of the Muslim cause. In our over-anxiety to run him down, we were inclined to believe that

he was playing up to the British, helping them to postpone the much-demanded freedom of our sub-continent.

When I tried a year later to see Mr. Jinnah again at a time when he was back in the news, I received an abrupt, almost discourteous note from his Secretary saying that Mr. Jinnah saw "no purpose in giving an interview".

Now I was in New Delhi again. I believed Mr. Jinnah would be even more reticent to give an interview to any Indian correspondent, particularly to one who had frequently criticised him. But when I telephoned to his Secretary, the faithful Khurshid, I was surprised to find his tone most affable. He indicated that Mr. Jinnah would probably see me. He would however check this and ring me back a little later. This he did. My appointment to see Mr. Jinnah was fixed. I was to call on him four days later at 10 o'clock in the morning.

Jinnah's residence in Delhi at that time was 10, Aurangzeb Road. When I arrived I was shown into an ante-room where, to my surprise, he was already sitting on a large, green leather chair. There was a footstool near him and telegrams of congratulations to him from all parts of the country lay in a stack on the floor. The attainment of Pakistan was undoubtedly his personal triumph.

Mr. Jinnah was wearing his usual light cream China silk suit, a striped shirt with a stiff turned-down collar. He looked pale and tired. The strain of the years he had fought for a homeland for the Muslims was at last beginning to tell on him, now that he had won his cherished goal. It often happens like that. So long as a man is in the thick of his fight his energy remains boundless, but when his goal is reached, the fatigue catches up on him all at once.

Mr. Jinnah, as every political correspondent of that time was aware, had fought a one-man battle against the battery of brains which the Congress party commanded. While every draft which emanated from the Indian national congress over the signature of Mahatma Gandhi was the result of a dozen legal and political brains in the party, Jinnah's reply in this exchange of correspondence was his

own one-man draft with his signature appended to it.

For a few moments, which seemed quite long to me, he continued opening telegrams, ignoring my presence in the room. I broke the silence by saying, "You have come a long way since we first met at Little Gibbs Road".

Then Mr. Jinnah spoke: "I want you to know that this is not to be an interview. The questions you would ask me I will not be in a position to answer. You will want to know what form and shape Pakistan will take, what our policy will be on various matters. It is too soon for me to give you an answer now. We have only just begun". He stretched forward to pick up a cigar from a silver box, cut the end of it with the cutter on a table at his side, lit it and took a few puffs. I had no option but to wait, for I had no idea what he would say next. "But there is an odd reason for my sending for you today", he continued. "I wanted to tell you something I have been meaning to say to you for quite some time".

I anticipated an aggressive barrage of words. Instead, in slow, deliberate tones, Mr. Jinnah continued: "Your heart has always been in unity and you have held a different point of view from ours. I have read the things you have written and while we differed all the way it was gratifying to find someone on the other side who was able to see that we too had a point of view. You fought hard against us but I respected you because you wrote out of a conviction and not for money".

I had not expected such a compliment from Mohamed Ali Jinnah. In fact he put me off my stride right then. That was all he had to say to me that morning. To all other questions, especially my most important question on how Pakistan which was divided in two separate parts would be able to defend itself, if the need ever arose, Mr. Jinnah replied; "Don't ask me these questions now. The future will decide. Right now we part friends and we shall remain friends". His attitude was summed up by his words, "Partition has now become a fact. We have to accept it as such". I abided by his wishes and realised that

this was not to be the interview I had sought. It was a personal message which he wanted to convey to me. He had sent for me only to deliver it himself. I never saw Mr. Jinnah again for on his entry into Pakistan he became too far away for an Indian correspondent to reach. Then he died.

The future will decide, he had said. The future did: when in December 1971, Pakistan lost its eastern wing which became the new state of Bangla Desh. In the attempt to defend it, which failed, Pakistan had no continuous land route. Men and material sent from Karachi had to travel all the way round the south coast of India, past Ceylon, to reach Chittagong, for Dacca. It is one of the tragedies of life that we get brushed aside so often despite the commonsense we utter, by those who have carved a niche for themselves as leaders. I had no pedestal to take with me to my interview with Mr. Jinnah.

I did a little stock-taking on that trip to Delhi which had undoubtedly been successful. Everywhere I went I was known, welcomed, respected. At the age of thirty-six which I was then and about to be a free man in my country, I was in an enviable position in Indian journalism. I was even better known as an author of several books published in London, New York and India, many of which had sold extremely well. Englishmen soldiering in South East Asia, particularly on the China-Burma front were thirsting to read something in the English language. Mr. Murphy, the enterprising Manager of my Indian publishing firm had so often said; "Haven't you got something new I can publish? We are selling your books faster than we are printing them."

Murphy was the only man in publishing who printed and published whatever manuscript I gave him. He never read the manuscript nor the finished book.

Just Flesh sold seven to eight editions, the novel which

two London publishers wanted me substantially to re-write. Sometimes when I have needed a copy myself, I have had to buy it from a secondhand bookseller at more than the original price.

At a small railway station on my way back from Assam during the war, I saw a station bookstall with only six books on display. There were all my books. As I looked contentedly at this display, the enthusiastic bookstall keeper, a little Assamese, picked up *Just Flesh* and said to me, "You will sure to like this book, mister. Even I getting hot and excited when reading it".

It was time to return to Bombay. Only one errand remained, the delivery of the envelope to the shrine. I had yet to find it in Delhi. "Any taxi man will take you there", mother had said.

Outside the Imperial Hotel, where I was staying, I got into a cab. It was well before sundown. To a bearded Sikh, I read out the name 'Nizamuddin Aulia' from the envelope in my hand. "Do you know where it is?" He asked if I wanted to be taken to Nizamuddin, the district of Delhi, or to the *dargah*?¹

"The *dargah*", I said.

He confidently nodded his head, revved his engine and drove out of the hotel gate. He said nothing till we hit the open road, then asked "You Muslim?"

I said I was not.

"You can't be a Hindu", he said.

I was not from that community either, I told him.

"Not Muslim, not Hindu", he said in surprise as if no other communities existed in India. This was perhaps because all political discussions had, for several months, centered around Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan.

¹ Tomb or shrine.

I helped him out, "Just as you are a Sikh but an Indian, I am a Parsi and an Indian. Understand?"

His head danced from side to side in approval of my explanation. He had heard of the Parsis, he informed me. They were from Bombay, which I confirmed. He added the further information that most of them were very rich. He improved on his observation by adding, "so we have heard". The "we" always did and still stands for "we in Delhi", we the rulers of India. The Moguls used it in their time, then the British did and now, with Independence, we will continue to use the regal "we" from Delhi, his remark implied. With Mountbatten shortly to leave that brick-red building; 'we' will soon be in Viceroy's House. Yes, chum, you and I. This may have been the feeling of the average man in the north, but it had not yet trickled down to the rest of India. It never did.

The drive to Nizamuddin's tomb seemed long and so I started a little conversation with my Sikh taxi-driver. If, as he knew, I was not Muslim, why would I be going to a Muslim shrine? "Everyone goes to this *dargah*", he replied, "Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs. It helps many people, they say. Lady Willingdon also went there". Lady Willingdon was the wife of a former Viceroy of India. Surely not her. When I expressed my doubts, he asked me to verify it at the shrine. "They should know about it", he added.

We drove down a long main road and suddenly branched off right, past a huge grey tomb, Mogul style. I asked if that was the tomb we were going to and he corrected me saying, "This is only the tomb of an Emperor. Emperors once they die, can't do anything", he added. "Only saints have that power".

We arrived at a small open space where there were innumerable small shops selling rose petals, garlands, packets of incense sticks and small white sweets. Hundreds of flies swarmed around them. The vendors were Muslims wearing red fezes. A few wore dirty white turbans, greyed with dust. There was a clamour for my custom and a

chorus of "saheb...saheb...saheb". Everyone wanted me to buy from their shop.

I bought a garland from one shop. "Not one", the vendor said, "you must buy two".

"Why two?" I asked.

The man did not explain, but everyone around me said I must buy two, so I did, without asking any further questions. Again I was asked to buy two platefuls of rose petals and two packets of incense sticks. Before walking through the main gate, I had to remove my shoes and leave them outside with hundreds of other pairs which had been left there. Then down a few steps which overlooked a deep large square-shaped open tank, the water of which did not look particularly clean. I was told this unhygienic water had great healing power though it would have been difficult for any man of science to believe it.

A young lad started showing me the way, and we turned left through a narrow, covered passage paved with old stone. It was lined with very aged beggars, men and women who in a chorus were begging for alms. It was pathetic to see such a sight in the precincts of a holy shrine, painful to listen to the wail of the beggars from one end of the corridor to the other. It was only for my mother's sake I was here. I did not think I would ever go there again. I thought of the diseases I could pick up from the beggars, close to whom I was walking barefoot. A bath with a strong anti-septic was what I planned to have on my return to the hotel. Shrines and *dargahs* were not for educated men like me. Once was enough.

At the end of the corridor, we turned left. We came to a large paved courtyard in the centre of which was an ornate, umbrella-shaped marble structure. The tomb was inside. As I was walking towards it, the young lad who was shepherding me, asked me to walk further forward.

"But isn't this the tomb?" I asked.

The youngster could not explain what he wanted to tell me. While we were fumbling to understand each other, an older man walked up from behind. With a graceful greeting

of his right hand which the Muslims call an *adab*, he asked, "You have not come here before?" I said I had not. "Then follow me". I did as I was told.

He informed me that he was the keeper of the shrine, the *mujawar*, the very man mother had asked me to see. He explained he was taking me to another tomb further away.

"This", he explained when we got to it, "is the tomb of Emir Khushro. He was a poet of the Mogul court". The *mujawar* named the Emperor in whose reign the poet lived. "Later when Nizamuddin *saheb* came to this place to preach Islam, Emir Khushro left the royal court to serve the saint. In time he became a *murid*¹ of Nizamuddin and devoted the rest of his life to the saint. He became his A.D.C., so to say". As everyone in Delhi, because of the Viceroys of India, knew what an A.D.C., meant, this was the best way of explaining the relationship to me. "Emir Khushro *saheb* is also a *hazrat*² in his own right", the *mujawar* said. The form was that no one could go to Nizamuddin without first obtaining permission as it were, from Emir Khushro. When these two died, they were buried side by side and the tradition still continued that you first pay your respects to Emir Khushro then you go to pray and ask for favours at the *dargah shareef*³. The *dargah shareef* was the tomb of Nizamuddin Aulia.

I followed the routine correctly, first to Emir Khushro's tomb. It was of marble, with an ornate gold-embroidered orange cloth laid over it. On this sheet, rose petals were strewn. At the head of the tomb, there were garlands. I laid a garland and sprinkled some of my rose petals, as others before me had done. The *mujawar* opened the packet of incense sticks for me and handed them over to me to hold and to light.

"How many do I light?" I asked.

"As many as you like. You can light them all if you wish".

So I did. With a match I lit the whole bundle. A heavy

¹ Disciple

² Saint or holy man

³ *shareef* means holy.

aroma of jasmine perfume exuded from the burning joss sticks. I held them in my hands and said a silent prayer, "My mother has sent me here. I am only an errand boy. Please give me permission to pay my respects to Nizamuddin's tomb". I must have said a few other words as befitting the occasion.

It was so peaceful here.

Near the door of the tomb, a woman in a *burkha* was bending down, saying her prayers. Her face, head and body were covered, but from her slender feet I could see she was a young woman. Her gold bangles and her clothes indicated she was of upper-middle-class. At the foot and at the sides of the tomb, men were standing, praying silently, a sight impressive to watch. They were praying with a devotion which compelled attention. But it was difficult to imbibe this scene with my logical mind and a brain that regarded such ritual as superstition. I could feel nothing within myself, but I could not help noticing how others around me were in a state of complete sublimation to this tomb. Yet this was only the half-way house to the main shrine I had yet to visit.

Permission duly requested and permission presumed to have been granted, I walked back with my second lot of rose petals, garland and incense sticks to the tomb of Nizamuddin. I felt a little more relaxed as I entered the ornate structure of this second tomb. Perhaps the aroma of the joss sticks was beginning to have a soothing effect on me or perhaps it was the soft twilight hour, the sun having set, that produced in me the mellower mood. Perhaps also it was because of the low, soft chanting of *gazals*¹ by three men, in the middle of the courtyard. They sang, facing Nizamuddin's tomb. The man in the centre sang the single lines, the other two joined in the chorus.

Singing at a holy shrine? I could not understand it at first. The *mujawar* explained these were holy songs, invocations to the saint who lay buried there. "Every

¹ Poems.

*Jumma-raat*¹ and *jumma*,² this man who leads the troupe of three comes from the city to sing the praises of Nizamuddin *saheb*. He has been doing this for several years now, out of devotion to the holy saint".

I went through the same ritual of sprinkling rose petals, placing the garland and lighting the sticks at Nizamuddin's tomb as I had done at Emir Khushro's. Then, able to concentrate a little more, aware also that the ~~entrust~~-entrusted to me was nearing completion, I silently said my own little prayer before his tomb. I remembered mother saying, "Ask for something for yourself too. You sometimes get what you ask for".

What would it cost if I asked for myself? Nothing, except a minute or two of my time. So, after I had spoken mother's message, I thought of what I should ask for myself. Two things interested me then for I was a young man with no encumbrances, no wife, no children. One was to enjoy myself, to be carefree; the other to win at the races. Winning at the races was a big thrill and seeing the horse I had backed squeeze out of a bunch, fifty yards before the winning post to get a shorthand verdict was most exciting. That thrill I have always rated high among the known thrills of the world.

Aware that one should not be frivolous or disrespectful in a holy place, I couched my request somewhat in this way: The main reason for which I came, I have completed. My mother said that I could pray for myself and may be if you felt like it you would help me some day. Unfortunately the type of things I want for myself are unholy things, fun in life, money won at racing, pleasurable living, good-looking women. I cannot ask these of you, who are a great and holy spirit, but these are my wants in life. I would be happy to have whatever you feel like giving me and I shall be thankful for whatever I receive. If I get into trouble, help me. That is all". These words said, I came out. The world was absolutely at peace. The first stars

¹ Thursday; literally night before Friday.

² Friday.

were beginning to appear in a clear blue sky.

I removed the handkerchief which covered my head and exchanged a few words with the *mujawar*. "My mother has given me a small envelope for you", I said, at which a young attendant walking with him produced a book in which to enter the contribution. There was a column for the name of the donor and three columns thereafter to indicate the purpose of the donation: feeding the poor, upkeep of the shrine and so on. As I had twenty-one rupees from mother, I divided the amount three ways and put seven rupees under each column. It was, however, when I put down my mother's name that he recognised me as her son.

There were quite a few tombs around, I noticed as I was talking to the *mujawar*. One was a tiny one with only earth on top. I asked whose tomb it was.

"This is the grave of Jahanara, daughter of Shah Jehan. She was different from his other children and she expressed a wish that when she died, she should be buried near Nizamuddin". Her wish was granted. The inscription on the side of her little tomb reads: Where I lie let the good earth cover me and over my tomb it is my wish that only green grass shall grow.

I walked back to the gate, identified my shoes and slipped them on my very dusty feet. The Sikh driver drove me back to my hotel. On the way he said, "Today you have had your first smell of incense. Now you have to wait. If your wishes are fulfilled, you will come again and again".

The smell was strong, heavily scented, oriental.

17

The train that dripped blood

AUGUST 14, 1947, the day of India's independence was to have been the realisation of all our aspirations. It seemed we would have nothing more to strive for after freedom was won. The chapters of the struggle which made glorious reading were quickly published and republished. The sordid episodes were withheld from the public. Only a few persons were fated to witness them. One such episode was the exchange of populations on the newly constituted borders of India and Pakistan. It fell to my lot to witness this ugly episode.

It happened like this: I was getting ready to go out to dinner one evening in September 1947, when my telephone rang. Makan my bearer answered it. A bearer is a man servant who bears trays of food and drink. He is an Indian version of the more expensive English butler. Makan was no ordinary bearer. He was President of the Malabar Hill Bearers Club. He was internationally known, having figured in several of my articles in *Punch*. He died of a heart attack while still in my service.

As Makan answered the telephone, I listened to him struggling with the caller's name. Then he uttered his pet phrase, 'Hold it on' and came to tell me, "One Captain Gurbaxani is wanting to speak to *saheb*".

I asked what the captain wanted.

"It is private upto confidential, he is saying", Makan replied.

I went to the telephone.

The captain whose name Makan had correctly given me was the A.D.C., to General Chimini. He had a personal message from his general for me.

Unfamiliar with the postings of India's top brass, I checked the general's present posting. I learned that Chimini was in charge of the exchange of populations between India and Pakistan on the Lahore-Amritsar border. With the partition of the sub-continent into two dominions, Lahore had gone to the newly-created state of Pakistan. Amritsar, home of the Sikhs, remained on our side.

"The general has sent me to Bombay to meet you and ask if you would come with me to Amritsar".

"Whatever for?" I asked in surprise.

"He has invited you to be his guest".

I was not aware of the reason for this peculiar invitation. Was there some kind of a function or parade in which the general was to play a conspicuous part, which he was desirous of getting reported? The daily press had made stray references to 'disturbances' on the border but that was all. Noticing that I was not very convinced by what I was told, the captain added, "If I can have an appointment to meet you, sir, I could explain it much better. It is not so easy to speak on the telephone". As, by now, I suspected the possibility of a practical joke, I also felt it would be better to meet the captain in person.

"When do you wish to see me?"

"Tonight, if possible, just as soon as I take bath", he replied. 'Take bath' was the typical Indian way of referring to this 'ablution'.

"I have only just arrived from the airport", the captain explained.

In journalism, one can afford to be fooled but it would be unforgivable to allow a good story to slip out of one's hands. As I was driving into town for dinner and as the captain was staying with relatives at that end of the town,

I said I would call on him on my way to dinner.

Some twenty minutes later I tooted my horn below his house and Captain Gurbaxani hurriedly came down. He was a Sikh, though his name did not suggest it. He wore long hair, twisted into a knot at the top of his head. A towel covered it for he had just bathed. He apologised for his unconventional appearance.

I asked to see his identity card by way of abundant caution. This he instantly produced. So I knew the man was who he said he was and an army captain.

Then he said, "Sir, the things that are happening on our border with Pakistan are unbelievable. Innocent people are being massacred. People of both sides have gone mad. In a frenzy they are killing each other. The army is doing its best but it is a most difficult law and order problem. The press speaks of disturbances but this is murder, mass murder; it is the slaughter of innocents. It has to be seen to be believed. That's why the general has sent me to Bombay. He wants someone like you to see it yourself and to report on it. We must have a record for posterity".

"As bad as that?" I asked. He nodded.

I ascertained how I could get there. The captain informed me that he carried a letter from General Chimini to the Air Force command at Delhi requesting them to fly us over. The Bombay to Delhi flight would be on our commercial airline, which the captain would arrange.

"When do you want to leave?" I asked.

"As soon as you are ready, sir".

It was Saturday night already, so we arranged to leave for Delhi by the morning flight on Monday. From Delhi we would be flown to Amritsar. We reached Amritsar on the afternoon of Monday.

A staff car met us at the airport and we were driven to General Chimini's residence on the Mall. "I am glad you have come", the general said, welcoming me. "I have read many of your books. That is why, when the boys asked me whom we should get to report on this madness,

I thought only of you".

I told the general I was grateful for his very nice compliment. "No", he interrupted. "What is important is that we are sure you will see everything from a broader perspective. This is not a Hindu-Muslim riot; this is human tragedy".

It was arranged that I would stay in Amritsar in the house of a Punjabi businessman in a newly-built locality away from the centre of the city. The businessman, anxious to oblige the general had offered to put me up. His house was very new. The tiles on the floor were still unglazed. I was given a room on the first floor of this bungalow. Proverbial Indian hospitality flowed in abundance, starting with a glass of iced *lassi*, a sweet buttermilk served with almonds, pistachios and rose petals floating on top. It made a very cooling drink in the hot weather. Later that afternoon I met the general again and was briefed on the broad outlines of the problem.

"But why do we hear so little about this in the press?" I asked.

"The press is not allowed here", he replied. "You are an exception. I have called you on my own responsibility because I feel you should see it so that public opinion may be aroused in the proper way".

We talked till late in the evening while the general attended to his khaki-coloured files, tied with coarse tape. They kept coming in and out of his room. Some he looked at and put aside, others he initialled and returned immediately.

So we talked until it was time for our evening meal, when we drove in his staff car to his club where in the open, close to the tennis courts, we dined. We ate typical north Indian food: *rogan josh* which was a mutton stew as served in the Punjab; mutton *pillau*; *roomalis* which were *chappatis*¹ made of wheat. *Roomal* means handkerchief and these *chappatis* being very thin were named after it. It was spicy food, delicious to eat but difficult to digest.

¹ Kneaded dough, cooked over an open fire.

Here everything seemed at peace. The general suggested a tentative programme for the next morning. A visit to some of the refugee camps was his suggestion. As we chatted, I thought I could hear the shouts of people screaming from afar. I pricked up my ears. "Sounds like a riot", I commented.

The general listened but shook his head. I felt sure however I was hearing human cries, faint but unmistakably the cries of people. The general shook his head a second time, and we resumed our conversation. Not long thereafter, we drove home.

I was collected soon after breakfast the next morning. We drove first to the area headquarters. In addition to soldiers on duty, Hindu and Sikh refugees were seated around the general's office getting their new lives sorted out. They stopped talking as I walked near them, staring at me grimly. It was here I learned that the cries I thought I had heard the night before were real. A refugee train going out of India had been derailed and attacked near Khalsa college. This was the second massacre of the day. The first had happened on an incoming train bringing refugees into India.

The latter train was attacked three times before it staggered into Amritsar station, first at Pind Dadan Khan in the Jhelum district, a second time at Shahdra and a third time between Moghulpura and Harbanspura. The armed guard escorting the refugees opened fire, but could not prevent casualties, which were reported at the general's headquarters to be 'heavy'. How many dead bodies fitted into that cryptic word, no one could tell me. All this was only hearsay. I had yet to see it for myself.

"We shall show you the train which was attacked last night", the general said.

"Let's go first to the camps", said an officer who was to

escort me that morning. He was a tall, strapping Sikh, a Colonel in rank. We rode in his jeep; the colonel drove it.

The camps lay some miles away from Amritsar so that the refugees would be kept away from the people in the city. With lakhs¹ of people on the move, there was always a fear of the outbreak of an epidemic. The water supply of the city had to be kept free from pollution. As the colonel drove, I looked around the quiet countryside. "Look", I exclaimed, "there's a dead body in the fields" The colonel barely turned his turbaned head.

"There will be plenty of dead bodies around here", he calmly said.

"But Colonel", I said, "there's a vulture eating it".

At this he half turned his head and nodded, saying that such a sight was also commonplace. We drove on. A half mile later, he murmured, "One dead body is nothing. Life has no value here". There was no further comment from him. We arrived at the first refugee camp.

The inmates of this camp were our own people, Indians of our free, new dominion. Herded like cattle they had come many miles on foot from the other side of the border. They had fled to India in search of safety just as Muslims were fleeing in the opposite direction to Pakistan.

At the edge of the road, we saw the refugees undoing their pyjamas and relieving themselves. The forty thousand people in this camp could hardly be expected to wait for sanitary fittings. Nature does not pause to allow governments to build lavatories. The smell of urine permeated the air. The colonel shook his head in despair. "The stench of freedom", he mournfully said. It had come to Amritsar, his holy city.

It was not dissimilar to the stench of Belsen. The danger here was greater, for the partition involved an exchange of over ten million people.

In their over-anxiety to sit in the gilded chairs left vacant by the British, the politicians of the two new

¹ A hundred thousand is a lakh.

dominions had not foreseen such an eventuality. Ten million people were uprooted from their place of birth, seeking refuge. These refugees, of both sides, were chiefly poor village people, unarmed and defenceless. Their misfortune was that they belonged to a different religion from the majority. They were running away to join their co-religionists across the border. "They are dying in equal numbers", the colonel remarked. "At the end of a week, the score is about even".

After our visit to the camp, the colonel asked me if I would like to see the train which had been attacked the night before.

"Yes, I would", I replied.

The colonel explained: "This was a train of Muslim refugees from East Punjab. It had come safely upto Amritsar, which was the last stop, before it crossed the border into Pakistan at Lahore. It had passed safely through two Sikh-populated towns, Ludhiana and Jullunder. Then news came of the Hindu train that had been attacked on its way out of Pakistan, and there was retaliation. The railway tracks were tampered with and the train was forcibly re-routed to a siding near Khalsa college. Here, a large mob of Sikhs lying in hiding in some broken-down railway quarters, rushed out to ambush and butcher the people in the train. The attack lasted three quarters of an hour".

I asked, "But who was in the train?"

"Refugees", the colonel replied, "just refugees—men, women, children. Three thousand refugees. The mob attacking the train was five thousand strong. And the mob was armed".

"Armed?" I looked surprised. Only the Army had the right to be armed.

"They carried *bhalas*¹ and *kirpans*".² These were primitive weapons common in this area.

"But is no licence required for carrying lethal weapons?"

The colonel explained that Sikhs were allowed to carry

¹ Short spears.

² Swords.

kirpans on religious grounds. *Bhalas* are short spears, tied to long bamboo poles.

By now we had reached the railway station where the train was being guarded by the army. A horrible smell exuded from the platform. The sentries on duty were wearing gauze pads as masks for the nose and mouth.

We walked along the platform with the colonel leading the way. Two armed guards flanked us on either side, their steel bayonets glistening in the morning sun. A bit unnecessary I thought when I could see no one except three solitary individuals huddled together in the middle of the platform.

We walked in slow step as at a funeral so that I could look into compartment after compartment. The train was still full, but everyone in it was a corpse. Corpses were sitting close to each other. Men and women were seen resting their heads on the shoulder of the person next to them, not because they were tired or sleeping; they were dead.

I went closer to the compartments to look. The dead sat in different poses, their mouths invariably open. The lobes of the ears of the women and the tips of their noses had been sharply sliced off. This was in order to get more easily to the nose and ear rings.

It was a horrible sight. Blood dripped from the carriages on to the platform. In the train, as the men and women sat huddled, their garments were soaked with blood. Some had their heads cracked open exposing the insides of their skulls. Children were not spared. One male child had its stomach pierced. A little girl, was lying naked with her stomach ripped open; the intestines showing. There was no distinction made between man, woman and child. Out of the three thousand passengers only the three whom I saw sitting on the platform, had escaped death. It was a trio of a man, a woman and a child, the three they forgot to kill.

All this had happened the day I arrived in Amritsar. I would not have believed the story of a trainful of erect

corpses if I had not seen the sight myself. The general had not exaggerated.

At the airfield in Adampur, near Jullunder, I saw a lone refugee wandering aimlessly along the airstrip. The clothes on his back were torn. He used a bamboo pole, cut to size, for a walking stick. In his other hand, he carried a sheet of paper torn out of an exercise book. On it a *munshi* had listed the various possessions which this refugee had lost in the partition. Their total value was the round figure of Rs. 4,500.¹

The *munshi* had written out the claim in the local script of the region. It was translated for me. It recorded the loss of a cow, a house and personal belongings. The claim was authenticated with the thumb print of the owner, in purple ink.

With the help of an interpreter I asked this wandering man what he proposed to do with his sheet of paper. He replied he was going to present it to the government.

"Which government", I asked.

"My government", he replied.

He then muttered something in his dialect, which the boys at the airport translated for me. He was asking me, 'Where can I find this government?'

That was the tragic plight of those who were involved in the partition of territory and the exchange of populations.

Foot convoys in the Lahore-Amritsar area used three routes to come to India. All three avoided Lahore the hot city of Pakistan. The route most used to cross the border was the Chunian-Khudian-Ferozepore Road. Chunian was the junction of various refugee movements from Mangatavana, Sargoda, Lyallpore and Sheikhpura. There was a similar junction at the headworks at Balloki where there was a big dam.

¹ £ 337 approx. in 1947.

A convoy was reported to have arrived at the headworks and I drove out to meet it. It extended from Balloki to Buchukee, a distance of fifteen miles. Half a million people were on foot and when the bridge over the dam had to be crossed, the crossing had to be staggered so that the bridge would not collapse. Those who had crossed over waited for days for the remainder of the convoy to join them. Bearing in mind that half a million people were involved, the refugees behaved in a most orderly fashion.

As my jeep crept along the far side of the road giving way to the oncoming convoy I noticed three corpses being carried away. "Cholera", explained one of the convoy leaders who could speak English. Then three elderly Sikhs whose beards were white, came up to speak to me. The oldest of the *Sardarjis*¹ spoke to me in English. He said, "Up to now it was all right. With cholera it is in the hands of God". The palms of his hands were upturned. He shrugged his lean shoulders.

He was not aware that I had no official status for I belonged neither to the army nor to the government. Perhaps my khaki clothes were deceptive, a left-over from the Burma front. But as the *Sardarjis* looked to me for help, I had out of compassion to ask how I could help them. The eldest did not reply. But one of the two others stepped forward and said, "We have doctors in our convoy. If only we could get some vaccines we could save our people".

Half a million people! And I was their lone hope of survival! When we had finished our talk, I had no option but to ask my jeep driver to turn around and soon I was on my way back to Amritsar, a hopeless mission to perform.

The civil administration admitted they had the cholera vaccine but at that hour of the night no one was sure where stocks could be located. Also no one had authority to release them to a convoy of refugees. But through the general, I got the Army Command to step in and by next morning a sizeable quantity of vaccine was despatched

¹ Every Sikh is addressed as a *Sardar* or leader. The 'ji' is a suffix for additional respect.

to the Balloki headworks.

Individuals had no meaning at the time of partition. Even groups in the thousands were inconsequential. Ten million people were involved in this exchange of populations, and an error of half a million would not matter to either country.

I realised then that with the transfer of power from the British, the weight of the administration had begun to tell on the yapping politicians of the two new dominions.

On October 3 of the same year, there was a conference of Indian leaders with outraged consciences. A statement was issued to the press. It said, "... The fact that hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children have been killed pales into insignificance before the ineffably barbarous nature of the atrocities perpetrated on them. It is a slur on animals to call the perpetrators beasts".

This chapter is based on my reports which appeared in the *Bombay Chronicle* and on my subsequent pamphlet, *Freedom Must Not Stink*, 1947.

‘Toff luck’

IN THE months that followed, my pattern of luck grew steadily worse with surprising reprieves, invariably at the last moment.

This was the time when I had ordered some furniture for my new flat. The bill for Rs. 7,500¹ was payable in fifteen equal monthly instalments. The Italian who manufactured my furniture then made me a tempting offer. He said he would accept Rs. 5,000 if I paid within a fortnight. I borrowed the money from a private bank. Not long thereafter the bank went into liquidation and its affairs were put into the hands of an official receiver, appointed by the court. I was asked to repay the loan immediately. To do this I had to borrow the amount from a Pathan² money-lender. This colourful character was expensive to deal with. His rate of interest was 10 percent *per month*! By the time I repaid the loan, my furniture had cost me Rs. 15,000, twice what I would leisurely have paid to the Italian.

My luck at gambling was no better. At the races, over a period of weeks, I backed horses to win which constantly ran second; twelve of these lost by a short head. When I finally backed a winner at the lucrative odds of 6 to 1, the red cone signifying an objection, was hoisted. I began to feel nervous, a sure sign that my money was lost. The

¹ £ 550. ² A tribe normally resident in the North-West Frontier and Baluchistan.

objection was upheld.

This was the time when in a last hand of poker, dealt to me in the morning of an all-night game, I filled in a full-house of kings with a one-card draw, only to be beaten by a Greek hotelier who also drew one-card to make an ace-full. "Toff luck", the Greek remarked, scooping up the pile of chips in the middle of the table. 'Toff' it was, all the way from 1946 to 1949 when a gold sovereign would turn into a brass farthing in my pocket. Double or quits had never worked for me.

If at this time I found myself in situations which seemed unduly rough, there were also occasions when relief came to me in the strangest ways. It usually happened after every effort of mine had failed.

On one such occasion I needed Rs. 5,900 to make two urgent payments, one to an obnoxious money-lender, the other a tax demand of an equally nasty income-tax official. Both had clearly warned me they would institute proceedings if the payments were not received by the last Monday in December.

Only a madman or one contemplating suicide would have ventured to gamble at the races on the previous week-end. Yet I was persuaded to go racing with the gift of a hundred rupee note from my mother. On the way to the races I was taken by her to Soonamai's prayer room to bow my head at the oil-lamp. While I did not resist being pushed either to the race course or to the prayer room, I was certain that neither place would produce the money I urgently required. Money did not come to me in this easy way. Since my mother said I should ask for help in this way, I silently uttered a few words of my own: "I do not believe such things are possible; my mother does. I am in trouble over money. I have to pay pressing debts. I would be grateful if you would help me lift this heavy load. I confess I am not a believer, but I am not a disbeliever either. At least let me be honest with you, whoever you are". I had no idea to whom I was praying. I merely did as I was told. Mother said that prayers at this shrine

were answered.

As mother and I came out of the prayer room, we saw Soonamai standing outside. Surprised at seeing me, she asked, "Hello! What has brought you here?"

"Trouble", I replied, "and mother". She was most amused. To my mother she said, "Your son is honest. I like him". Mother went on to spell out my problems. Soonamai listened, but only with half her attention. This frequently happened with her and I was sure it was because she was listening to an inner voice at the same time. Unruffled by mother's narration of my troubles, she commented, "It's a small *taklif*.¹ It will pass".

Small! Five thousand nine hundred rupees was not small to me at that moment. As mother had mentioned that I was reluctant to go racing, Soonamai remarked, "Why don't you go? It will please your mother if you do". Then turning her head in the direction of the prayer room, she said, "He is very kind". Her advice was unusual, for as a rule religious people do not advocate or encourage gambling. I dropped my mother home and went on to the race-course.

In the prevailing state of my luck, straight betting would have paved the way to self-destruction. But by the queerest twists and double twists of circumstance I bought two tickets in the daily treble pool at the modest cost of ten rupees.² One of the tickets was alive for exchange in the eighth race, the last leg of the treble. Twenty-three horses were running in this race. It seemed easier to find a needle in a haystack.

I went over to the bookmakers' ring to watch the betting. It gave no clue; six horses were being backed in this race. Then a strange thing happened. I noticed a beam of sunlight come through a crack in the wooden awning of a bookmaker's stall. It fell on the name of a horse. I moved closer. "Nizamuddin!" it read.

"Nizamuddin!" I recognised the name. It was the saint at whose tomb in Delhi I had burned my first incense

¹ Bother or trouble.

² 15 shillings at the time.

sticks. Without further thought I exchanged my ticket. Then to the stands to watch the race.

By now I was inwardly so excited, I could hardly follow the race even with the help of my powerful binoculars. At the bend I could see my horse in the bunch. In mid-straight I caught sight of him, again squeezed in, fighting for a position at this crucial moment of the race. Then Nizamuddin came through and four horses flashed past the winning post in a blanket finish.

I closed my eyes. Nizamuddin, I knew, was one of the four but no one except the judge could separate them. There were no photo-finish cameras in those days. The judge announced Nizamuddin as the winner. I had won the treble pool.

When the dividend was declared, the coincidence was even more striking. The treble paid Rs. 5,900! I had won what I was not able to borrow.

I drove to Soonamai's, knelt in gratitude before the oil lamp, then on to mother's to give her the good news. I also gave her the money to hold. I could not trust my luck.

This was the time when after nine years of service on the *Bombay Chronicle*, I received one evening an urgent letter, hand-delivered to my house. With no reasons stated, it gave me a month's notice of the termination of my services. Checking with the boys on night duty at the office I discovered that the whole of the editorial staff of the paper had been peremptorily dismissed because of a threatened strike in the machine room below.

Within a week the strike was settled and the management withdrew all the notices, including mine. But while others gratefully returned to work, I preferred to stay sacked. As I said to the proprietor, "If for no fault of mine, you sack me after nine years of service, what security is there in my job?"

Thereafter, in the course of discussions we agreed to start a weekly newspaper, independent of the existing group, in which the owner of the Chronicle and his two sons would own three-quarters and I would have a quarter share. Under this arrangement I produced a new weekly for them and worked on it for a whole year. I was allowed to draw a salary of Rs. 1,000¹ every month. Hard earned, I thought. When accounts were finalised at the end of the first year, I was told we had made a small loss. This was because my salary had been matched on the balance-sheet by similar payments to each of the three other shareholders. I did not think this was fair accounting.

I poured out my tale of woe to Tehmi on the telephone, "Please ask *Bawa* what he advises me to do", I said. Hammered by circumstance I was trying to cling on to the first straws of faith.

This was the time my income had dwindled by eighty percent. The book trade had come to a standstill. Royalties from my publishers were nil.

There must have been a lot of people in trouble and feeling confused at this time, for it took over a week before the answer to my question was available with Soonamai. Tehmi would give it to me. I was told. I got in touch with her at once.

Tehmi came straight to the point. She said, "*Bawa* said, 'Tell him to resign at once and start his own paper'." Tehmi ended the conversation abruptly, saying, "That's all".

I was dumbfounded. Already I was heavily in debt. My loans were from the most expensive of lending markets. The only earning I had was the thousand rupees I was allowed to draw each month. If I resigned even this would stop.

While I was trying to explain to Tehmi the difficulty of resigning at once, she cut me short, saying, "That is the answer *Bawa* has given. He said nothing more. It is for you to decide what you should do".

When the telephone conversation ended, I sat and

thought. It was the end of the month and I did not have a rupee. I had never been so broke. My bearer who had seen many a difficult day with me and who had credit of his own at the local grocer's shop tactfully indicated to me that he too was broke. He reviewed the position of victuals in the house. There were no eggs for breakfast for the next morning, he casually remarked. We needed butter, and some money to buy the morning loaf of bread ! To solve this problem which had suddenly cropped up that evening, I had to drive down to my club and borrow ten rupees from the hall porter. It was a facility allowed to members in emergencies, although it is doubtful whether it was ever intended to be used for buying eggs, butter and bread for breakfast.

With this immediate financial problem solved, I rang my mother to tell her about the quandary in which I found myself. She listened but made no comment. My father advised I should secure another job before giving up the one I had. But that was not in line with what *Bawa* had said. His precise words were 'Resign at once'. Such words must have meaning, I argued.

"One cannot abandon one's own judgment because of a message from a spiritual source", my father argued. "You have to think of how you will live". This was exactly what I was doing, thinking. But I was utterly confused. I needed sleep to think afresh in the morning. The decision had of necessity to be mine. Either I followed *Bawa* blindly, or I had to turn and twist his advice to fit the pattern of rational reasoning.

The next morning I made up my mind. I realised it was pointless calling in a doctor and then trying to write out the prescription for him. That afternoon I went to see my partners. "A month from now", I told them, "I shall be leaving you". They did not believe me.

The next day, I began to think how I could start a new weekly newspaper. Within ten days I found the nucleus of a share capital, eighty thousand rupees.¹ The first

¹ £ 5,500.

issue of *Current* was on sale in the streets of Bombay eight weeks later, on September 25, 1949. On its front page I carried a testament of faith. It read:

I BELIEVE above all in God and His greatness and in the inherent right of each Man to his own form of religious worship.

I BELIEVE in Man and his dignity, his right to live a free and ample life, his right to breathe the fresh air of freedom wherever freedom has been proclaimed.

I BELIEVE in democracy and that it only means government of the people, by the people, for the people and nothing else.

I BELIEVE in freedom in the accepted sense of that term not in our whittled down local version.

I BELIEVE in the component parts of that larger freedom to which all men of self-respect aspire: freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of religious belief, freedom of public meeting, freedom from want, fear and hunger.

I BELIEVE that since August 1947¹ there has been a great betrayal of our people and that in the name of national emergency we are gradually being herded like sheep into a near-fascist state.

I BELIEVE more than ever before in the democratic way of life and I believe in those who foster it.

I BELIEVE in the rule of law, in the sanctity of a man's home, of his individual freedom, of his private and personal property.

I BELIEVE in the right of every man to hold his own opinion, however wrong.

I BELIEVE it is the function of the press to speak out about men in public life and public affairs.

I BELIEVE that a free press is a unit of democracy and that it can never be a unit of government.

I BELIEVE that as a leopard does not change its spots an editor should not change the fundamental principles of his editorial policy.

¹ The month and year of India's Independence.

I BELIEVE that it is the primary function of a newspaper to gather and report news and that it is the function of a newspaper man to see that the supply is not tainted.

I BELIEVE that comment must be free but facts must be sacred.

I BELIEVE that a journalist must not be squeamish about the way he attacks a man in public life if the public man's conduct or action justifies such an attack.

I BELIEVE that the only way to attack is to attack effectively. A bull must be taken by the horns.

I BELIEVE that the voice of opponents, no less than of friends, has a right to be heard.

I BELIEVE equally that a journalist should never be ashamed to admit when he is wrong and to make honourable amends when the occasion demands it.

I BELIEVE that even under the severest threats a journalist should never sell his soul.

I BELIEVE that all forms of regimentation make morons out of free men, but free men must have a reasonable modicum of discipline.

I BELIEVE in the grace of living, in the common decencies of life even though these facets of life appear to be fast disappearing.

I BELIEVE in my country and my people.

So help me God!

Below this testament appeared my name as the paper's editor.

It was not easy for me to start a new paper at that time. I had been arrested twice by the Government of Bombay¹ in the same year. The charges against me died in the courts of the magistrates before whom crime, big and small, is tried. After losing in the lower court, the govern-

¹ Later bifurcated into the two States of Maharashtra and Gujarat.

ment would go in appeal only to be struck down a second time by the High Court. One of the judges on the Bench indicated to the advocate general, who was pleading for the government, that he had no case at all. The advocate general who it seems, had been pushed by government to plead a hopeless case in appeal, started to congratulate me on my victory, when the case was over. "You deserve to win", he said, as we walked out of the appeal court.

Arrests did not worry me for they could be resisted in the courts of law. It was, however, the shocking misuse of government machinery and the waste of public money for venting personal vindictiveness that was so distasteful to watch: the tapping of my telephone, the trailing of my movements and the steaming open of my letters. This was the first indication that while Indian political leaders had talked a great deal about police harassment in the days of the British, when their turn came to rule, they could not govern the country without resorting to the same degrading methods of which they had complained.

Being followed by a plain-clothes policeman on a motorcycle became somewhat absurd once I became aware of what was happening. To put him off my track was not difficult for he seemed to be very dimwitted. I would drive in the morning to one of the big hotels in town, enter by one door, leave it by another, take a cab, drive around and do my work in town and return by the afternoon to collect my car beside which the policeman would still be sitting. I did this for the first three days. Then I drove him nineteen times around a small circle at the junction of four roads. Finally I stopped my car and beckoned to him to come over. With hesitation, he did. "How much petrol have you got?" I asked him, adding, "I have a full tank".

With folded hands, he pleaded, "Sāheb, it is not my fault. My instructions are to follow you. I don't want to lose my job".

"You won't lose your job", I comfortingly replied. "I will help you to do it". He was very happy that we would

be doing his job together. I saw to it that he discharged his duties faithfully and gave reports which were helpful to both of us. When the case was over and the police superintendent paid me a friendly visit, he remarked, "Of all the people we have trailed, your movements were the most difficult for us to understand".

More inconvenient, however, was to have my telephones tapped. The news of this activity came to me from an anonymous caller, "Sir, your telephone is now ordered to be tapped. Be careful what you say". I thanked him for informing me. "That's all right, sir. We small people are all with you". The words seemed sincerely uttered. While I was thinking of ways of foiling these degrading methods used by the government, I hit upon an idea. It was based on my theory that dirty methods can only be countered by equally dirty tactics.

I went to my mother and made an arrangement to telephone her every night at 10 o'clock. These 10 p.m., conversations were not to be believed, I told her. I began by showing anxiety at government's action against me. This pleased the government enormously. But later I began to narrate sordid details on the telephone, with names of individuals, on how some members of the government had been behaving. Part of this was true but a great deal was made up by me. I was aware that the transcripts of my taped conversation passed through the police department, the home department, all the way up the hierarchy of government to the chief minister himself. Thus someone along the line was bound to be embarrassed by what I revealed, and no action could be taken against me for false allegations because my conversations with my mother over the telephone were privileged. My tactics worked; orders were passed soon thereafter that transcripts of my telephone conversations were no longer required. Privacy of conversation was restored to me with the same anonymous voice telling me, "You are in the clear again". It made life easier for me.

In India at the time there were a lot of puny men entrusted with jobs which they were not big enough to handle. The belief, however, was that it did not matter how badly we are governed so long as we make the mess ourselves. Thus nationalist in tone, our freedom was empty in reality. We were fiddling with fads like prohibition, digging up old customs, taboos and superstitions and equating them with lost or dormant landmarks of India's civilisation which they never were. The government believed that the best way to foster equality was to take everyone backward to the illiterate state of the majority. That men should advance slowly did not conform to the theoretical pace of Nehru's dynamic socialism. Nehru was a man of big phrases. My book on him, *Nehru, The Lotus Eater from Kashmir*, summed him up.—

One of the cases filed against me was for alleged violation of the Prohibition Act. I faced a criminal charge for printing the words, "Drink like a man! This is a black and white advertisement". Another criminal charge I faced was for printing a cartoon which the government alleged was "obscene"! It was a sketch of a girl lying on the beach, her torso fully covered with an opened-out copy of our weekly. Two yokels selling coconuts, were looking on. The caption read, "You can never tell what's inside that paper". That was 'obscene', the government maintained!

The magistrate, aware of the ulterior motive in bringing such a case to court against me, laughed at the government pleader's desperate attempt to obtain even a token conviction. If a less careful magistrate had fined me even a rupee, the conviction would have involved moral turpitude and I would automatically have lost my membership of the clubs in India to which I belonged. That this could have been the real motive of a man holding the position of chief minister of a major state of the new India seemed

incredible. But it was common knowledge that it was. No wonder we remained for so long an underdeveloped country. The development of the mind was constantly being arrested in those who governed us.

Even so I had hopes that this was only a passing phase in India. I felt we would, one day, become a powerful, democratic country, and our people would grow into a great nation. I believed there was real substance in our country and rich character in our people. We would never become morons, I was sure, because our people were too deeply steeped in religion to allow communism to get a grip on us.

Meanwhile in my personal life two important incidents occurred. In March 1952 my mother died and a year later, again in the same month, I married. I must have made an unusual bridegroom, for I married while under arrest, this time charged with having printed a 'forged document, knowing or having reason to believe that it was forged'. The government also impounded my passport. The document I had published was a photograph of a letter purported to have been written by the U.S. ambassador in India to a procommunist editor. The signature was genuine; the letter was not. The photo was of a cut-and-paste job planted on me as genuine which I admit I naively swallowed. Intended perhaps to be a practical joke, it ended up in criminal actions in the law courts. After some ten months, the case and the charges against me had to be dropped because the government was not able to get a conviction against the man charged with having committed the forgery. As the main charge of forgery failed, there could be no charge sustained for having printed a forged document.

Impounding my passport was only harrassment wrapped up in the cotton wool of abundant caution. When I sent a telegram to Prime Minister Nehru telling him that I had received an invitation from Rootes Group, the big British motor manufacturers, to visit London as their guest for the motor show and requesting the release of my passport to enable me to go, he replied: REGRET UNABLE INTERFERE WITH ACTION OF STATE GOVT. It

implied that the chief minister of Bombay had taken this action.

Many years later when I became friendly with the same chief minister who was Morarji Desai, I asked him why he had earlier been so vindictive about my passport. Desai asserted he had acted only on the orders of Mr. Nehru! I did not probe this matter any further. It would have been too disheartening to ascertain which of the two Indian leaders, a prime minister or the man who later became his finance minister, had not spoken the truth.

The way my passport was eventually returned to me was interesting. We had come to know that Mr. Nehru's sister, Mrs. Pandit, was to be proposed as president of the U.N. The Indian government was anxiously lobbying to make her election certain. To coincide with this, half a dozen members of the Indian parliament jointly asked a question about my impounded passport. The effect was electric. To avoid adverse publicity at such a time, orders were hurriedly passed to have my passport immediately restored to me. On the morning of Independence Day, August 15, 1953, a holiday all over India, an official of the government came personally to communicate the news to me. He said that if I so wished, he had orders to have the regional passport office opened on that great national holiday in order to issue a new passport to me.

"No hurry", I calmly replied. I had produced the desired effect.

19

The dream

WHILE MY struggle for survival was at its height and my finances at their lowest, I had a strange dream.

An uncle of mine, a favourite from my childhood days, a retired colonel in the Indian medical service, was critically ill. He was a D.S.O., of the first world war, a military honour which the British did not bestow over-lavishly. A quiet unobtrusive man, he was a surgeon whose name was a legend in Lahore of the India before partition. I was distressed that such a life devoted to healing one's fellowmen was ebbing away. He had suffered a heart attack and the doctors did not give him many hours to live. His eldest daughter was rushing down from Delhi and I volunteered to collect her from the airport, late at night, to bring her to him. It was two o'clock in the morning when I returned from this errand and went to bed. My uncle survived that heart attack and went on to live for another seventeen years, but that is incidental to the story.

In the early hours of that morning I had an unusual dream. It was long, continuous, vivid, and in a setting totally strange to me. I have had dreams before but nothing like the one I had on the early morning of April 6, 1954.

I was walking in the dream with a friend, down a narrow lane. The lane was primitive. I thought I had seen such a lane in the vicinity of the old Chow Mohalla Palace of the Nizams of Hyderabad, but it was really not the same.

Its ground was unpaved, the earth was a dusty grey. Very poor people walked in it. The friend I was with, Hoosein a Muslim, Khoja by sect, was wearing a bright blue jacket with white satin-duck cotton trousers. I was walking beside him in a white half-sleeved shirt, my normal working-day clothes. I do not know whether the clothes in the dream had any significance, but it was with the knowledge of their colour and texture that the dream began. I record these details because I have found from experience that sometimes details which at first seem inconsequential, are later found to have some meaning.

Hoosein and I were chatting light-heartedly. There were people near us, cluttering up the path, slowing down our stride. The people, all men, were walking in the same direction as we were. That they were very poor could be judged from the coarse grey cloth they wore. We then became aware that some important person was coming behind us. There was a murmur in the crowd. There was jostling. Hoosein and I moved to one side. Our reaction was to make way for this important person to pass. We did not know who he was.

At this point in the dream, Hoosein faded out. My attention turned to the scene before me. Everyone ahead was kneeling in prayer. As this man came nearer, the people showed great respect for him, more than one does to a human being. There was a sea of bodies kneeling down, double bent in homage, their foreheads touching the grey dust. The people were huddled close to each other, their heads covered with the same coarse grey cloth which they wore.

Suddenly a beam of light fell on the kneeling crowd as if the skies had parted to let the light through. It grew brighter and, to my amazement, it began to move over the kneeling bodies. As the light moved, the bodies stirred. A moment later I heard deep, piercing sighs from the men huddled on the ground followed by words I had never before heard, "Hazrat Ali, Hazrat Ali". Their deep sighs indicated relief from pain.

The light moved on until it came to where I stood. It flowed ahead of a man of strong physique. He was turning right into an enclosure surrounded by straw matting which had a narrow opening in it. I could see nothing beyond but there was an awareness that it was a holy place. As he approached the opening he raised his left hand to hold on to the bamboo pole to which the matting was affixed. With a deliberate step he walked over a shallow, hand-made mound of earth alongside which ran a narrow stream of water. This was another detail vividly seen in the dream. It seemed strange that he was taking so much care to step over so small an obstacle.

Because of his measured step I had time to notice his powerful arms which came out of the half-sleeves of his tunic. They were the arms of a *pahelvan*.¹ All of him was powerful. The garment he was wearing was loose-fitting. Its colour was snuff-brown, and on it there was a sparsely sprinkled gold motif somewhat like the *fleur de lis*. It resembled the tunic of a Roman soldier. A cord of twisted silk, again gold in colour to match the overprinted design, was tied around his waist, its loose ends hanging from the side. He wore strange headgear from the back of which hung a piece of cloth to cover the nape of his neck. Thus the back of his hair was hidden from view. His legs were strong and muscular. He had the wheat coloured complexion of a fair Arab.

Through the gap in the straw matting he went inside, a man whose name I learned only from the sighs of the men bowed in reverence to him. *Hazrat* I knew meant 'saint' and Ali was obviously his personal name but I had never heard that name spoken by anyone before.

There was a pause, enough to allow him time for his prayers. There was no visual evidence, however, that he was praying; it was just a feeling one got from the happen-

¹ An Urdu word which cannot too easily be translated into English. It implies a strong man, a man radiating strength and power but not just a man of brawn. A *pahelvan* is a term of respect, for it also implies righteousness in the use of that strength.

ings around him. I could see nothing beyond the straw matting nor could I see him after he had gone inside the enclosure. Time in a dream cannot be measured, but the feeling was that some time had passed. I was now standing by myself on the far side of the lane with unknown people milling around me. Suddenly a light shone once again. It came through the gap in the matting. It moved forward. The people hurriedly knelt down again with their foreheads touching the ground. They seemed aware of the same holy presence as before. Once again the light fell on their bent backs, and there was again a deep sigh from those prostrate on the ground. The sigh seemed to come from the earth itself and then, with a great heave of relief the same name was quietly uttered again, twice as before, "Hazrat Ali, Hazrat Ali". There seemed to be a longing for him. The sigh pierced through me.

At the entrance to the gap he stood. Between us were the bodies of the people kneeling in the lane. His face was covered with a small muslin cloth attached to his turban. Just as his neck was hidden from view, so was his face. With his left hand he moved this cloth aside, to reveal his face to me. But I could not see anything except a blinding light. It was like looking into the sun. I persevered. I fixed my gaze on his uncovered face. Then I saw it clearly. It was the face of a man in his late thirties or early forties. He wore a black beard, groomed at the sides and pointed, though not too sharply, at the chin. He looked at me with a fixed gaze. Then he stretched his right hand out to me. The distance between us was more than an arm's length but somehow it shrank as I tried to reach for his extended hand. It seemed as if the immobile bodies, knelt in prayer, had parted to make way for me. The space between us was now only an arm's length. Petrified at this amazing phenomenon, I stretched out my hand to grasp his. He held my hand in his, then with a gentle, affectionate pull he slid me past him on his right. I was dissolved into thin air.

I awoke. My pulse was throbbing in my throat. My

body was covered in gooseflesh. I was out of breath and perspiring. I steadied myself in the dark, then switched on my table lamp. My wife asked whether I was all right.

"Yes", I said, "but I have had a strange dream".

"Tell me about it in the morning", she said, turned over and went back to sleep.

I sat up and lit a cigarette. I went over my dream once more to make sure that I would not lose any detail of it. I was aware I had experienced a rare phenomenon, but I had little idea what it meant. What confused me was the name of the man in the dream, uttered on both occasions with a deep sigh, "Hazrat Ali, Hazrat Ali". I waited for the morning to come, smoking incessantly till sunrise. It was still too early to disturb anyone. I was anxious to find out from Soonamai what my dream meant.

From seven o'clock that morning I drank several cups of tea. The cigarettes and tea were intended to cover up my inner nervous excitement. I wanted time to pass quickly so that I could narrate it to Tehmi who would in turn relate it to Soonamai. I kept looking at the wrist watch on my bedside table. At 7.45 I picked up the receiver and dialled Soonamai's number hoping that someone in her house would be awake. Soonamai normally never picked up the telephone herself, but that morning she did. At the sound of her voice, I became tongue-tied. Then I spoke up, "Mai, this is Dosoo".

"Yes, son", she calmly replied, "tell me". Did she already know why I had telephoned to her so early that morning? Her voice betrayed no haste to know the purpose of my call.

"I have had a dream, I want to tell you about it. I am sorry I rang so early".

"Tell me", she said, again quite calmly. "What did you dream?"

I told her, going through detail after detail, until I came to the first time the people in the dream sighed, "Hazrat Ali, Hazrat Ali". At this, she exclaimed with much pleasure in her voice, "*Bawa*¹ has come to you".

¹ Gujarati for father; in Arabic, it would be *Baba*.

"That's what I want to know. Who is this man who came to me in the dream?"

"He?", she almost chortled with laughter. "Silly boy, to whom do you think you have been praying all these years?"

"But, *Mai*, we have always called him Mooshkel Aashan Saheb.¹ That's how you taught us to say his name".

"Mooshkel Aashan Saheb, Mauli Ali, Hazrat Ali, it's the same. He has chosen to come to you as Hazrat Ali. But now tell me the whole dream". So I did, right up to the point he took my hand in his and drew me beyond him.

"You don't know how blessed you are", *Mai* said, "For the present, don't mention this dream to anyone".

"Not even to my wife?"

"You can tell her of course, but not to all others. A time will come when you yourself will know that you can speak about it. Then you can tell anyone you wish to tell. And I want to see you today. I want to hear it all once again. I want to see the man to whom my Maula Ali has appeared." *Hazrat* I knew meant saint; *maula*, she explained, meant head priest. He had come to her in a dream as Maula Ali. "People call him differently but it is the same Ali, to some the greatest name in Islam after the prophet Mohammed." With this she put down the telephone, leaving me more mystified than ever.

What was the significance of it all, I asked myself.

Hazrat Ali had clearly told his disciples that he was not God. When some of his followers disobeyed him and insisted that he was, he told the speakers of those words that their utterances were blasphemous. When they persisted, he drew out his sword and struck the blasphemers' heads. It is said that eleven men persisted in disobeying him and eleven heads were slashed. But all this I heard many years later as details about him trickled through to me. I did not

¹ 'Mooshkel' means difficulty or trouble; 'aashan' means to soothe; 'saheb' means lord or master. He is also referred to as Mooshkel Kusa, which has the same meaning.

search for details; I merely clung on to the image I had seen and the faith that came with it.

Hazrat Ali is not God, but to me who has devotedly followed him through the years, even though I am a Parsi and not a Muslim, he is a way of life, and as I began to live it I realised he was religion itself. Which religion? That question has no answer for while to some Muslims he is the essence of Islam, he is all religions to me.

Later that day I called at Soonamai's to relate my dream to her, once again. She was very happy.

It took a long time for me to understand the implications of my dream, even longer to feel the full impact of the power which came from the clasp of that firm, protective hand.

Soonamai had told me to note down the details of the dream and to keep them safely with me. This seemed necessary at first but when I kept recapitulating them for years thereafter, they became so much a part of my life that I could not possibly forget them: the lane, the people milling around me who later bent down in prayer, the way Hazrat Ali had walked with a slow deliberate step, his snuff coloured Arab tunic with the tiny gold motif on it, the glow of light which preceded him, his face which he uncovered for me to see and finally the way he pulled me over towards him.

Being a Parsi, the dream was foreign to my religion. But there was no change of religion implied in the dream, nor did it have anything whatsoever to do with religion. It was my first meeting with a man I had never before seen, never knew, never heard of. That he was entitled to be the first Caliph of Islam¹ according to the Shias² but was fourth

¹ Caliphs of Islam were spiritual heads; they should not be confused with the Caliphs of Turkey who were temporal sovereigns.

² Sect of Islam.

according to the Sunnis,³ was incidental, as also the fact that next to the prophet Mohammed, he was the most important figure in that religion. He was a first cousin of Mohammed as also Mohammed's son-in-law for Hazrat Ali married the prophet's daughter, Fatima. But this again I ascertained in later years. His appearance to me in the dream was a personal visit.

Religion in India has always been a delicate subject; it is also inflammable, having frequently sparked off riots on the feeblest excuses. Therefore, quite apart from Sohamai's advice, I was at first shy of discussing my dream with anyone. Later when I started to mention the incident to religious minded Muslims and at *dargahs* they looked sceptically at me and tended to dismiss it as being a figment of my imagination. "You are not a Muslim", some said, "so why would he come to you?"

"Don't ask me why", I frequently replied to many an important, highly placed Muslim or Arab. "Ask Hazrat Ali".

The dream had occurred while I was in the midst of writing *Fabulous Mogul*, my book on the seventh Nizam of Hyderabad, who was alive at the time. He was a difficult person to meet; an interview with him was said to be impossible. It was only because I knew Taraporevala, his financial advisor and right hand man, that His Exalted Highness agreed to see me.

On the afternoon of our meeting, when the half hour given to me came to an end, I got up to leave. The Nizam's next visitor was to be Sir Alexander Clutterbuck, British High Commissioner in India, who with his wife and daughter was invited to tea. But the Nizam decided that I should also stay on and have tea with them. That was Hazrat Ali's doing. The Nizam was a devoted follower of the great Ali. Although the dynasty of the Nizams was Sunni, it was because of the strangest circumstances that Nizam VII succeeded his father to the throne, born as he was humbly 'out of the palace compound' to a singing girl who was his mother. But this singing girl was so great a devotee

³ *Ibid.*

of Ali that her son came to rule over the greatest princely state of India.

It so happened that when Lord Curzon came to Hyderabad on his official visit as Viceroy of India, this boy was the only male heir on the premises of the palace. He was sent for and Lord Curzon approved of him to succeed his father, Nizam VI. Once it was decided in agreement with the Viceroy that the young Osman Ali should become the seventh Nizam, the official seal of approval was stamped forever on him. Even though two sons were later born to Nizam VI, by one of his senior wives, the singing girl's son, with the blessing of Hazrat Ali, succeeded his father to the great throne of Hyderabad.

I stayed on to tea. The financial advisor whose house guest I was that week-end in Hyderabad, remarked to his wife, "Something peculiar happened". He was referring to the Nizam and me. "This is not the way H.E.H. normally behaves. They got on as if they had known each other. I can't understand it".—I realised who had arranged that meeting between us. I wrote *Fabulous Mogul* at Hazrat Ali's bidding, though the late Nizam will now never know that fact. With my book I restored the lost prestige of that once great princely kingdom into which Nehru sent him armed battalions, calling it a 'police action'. The Nizam, it must be said, was not correctly guided by his advisors at the time. India could not afford to have an autonomous sovereign state in its underbelly.

In Hyderabad there is a hill called Maula Ali. I realised it must have some connection with the man in my dream. The Nizam's second son, Prince Muazzum Jah, lent me his cream-coloured Packard car and an aide, a Christian lad by the name of Henry Luschwitz, to take me to this hill.

Muazzum Jah was an old card-playing friend of mine. Between 1938 when I returned from England to 1947, the

year of Independence, he threw some fabulous parties in the Hyderabad state guest house on Bombay's Malabar Hill. This building looked more like a hunting lodge than a prince's abode or a Nizam's palace. Here we played *chemin de fer* all night finishing the last shoe at dawn with champagne still being served as it was all through the night, ending up with fried eggs and coffee in the morning. The late Prince Aly Khan whenever he happened to be in Bombay would join the party, a charming player who lost with the happiest smile on his face.

Chemin is a man's game and not everyone is at home playing it. The rest of the prince's guests would dance, for an orchestra was in attendance all night. Sometimes these grown up guests would amuse themselves playing parlour games! I remember being pulled out of the card game one night by Muazzum Jah's stunningly beautiful former wife, the Turkish girl whose name was Niloufer. She decided that someone was needed at their end of the party to whip up enthusiasm to play nursery games. I was picked up by her to lead in 'Here we go gathering nuts and may'. It was a crazy patch of youth which comes only once in a lifetime.

But when I saw the prince in Hyderabad many years later he had considerably quietened down. He said he had turned an ascetic. He was standing beside me quietly uttering a prayer on the balcony of his house and bowing his head in a certain direction when I asked him who was this hill, Maula Ali.

"I was just praying to it", he replied.

It was from this casual utterance that I drove to Maula Ali after lunching with him that day. At three o'clock in the afternoon, Luschwitz and I drove through the suburbs to the foot of the hill where I saw there were four hundred and ninety-five steps to climb before we could reach the little shrine at the top. Slowly we walked up the steep hill, pausing several times on the way to take breath. The old Nizam, we were told, used to climb up without a single halt, which was remarkable for a man of his age. But Luschwitz

and I could just stagger to the top.

Then our faces fell for there was a large board at the entrance to this holy place which read : NON-MUSLIMS ARE NOT PERMITTED BEYOND THIS POINT. It was frustrating that afternoon on the hot plateau of the Deccan in which Hyderabad is situated, for an Anglo-Indian who was Henry and a Parsi who was myself to have climbed the four hundred and ninety-five steps of Maula Ali only to read this restriction that we could not take a step further because we were not Muslims. Nor was there anyone in sight with whom we could argue.

Suddenly something stirred inside the holy shrine. We heard footsteps coming towards us. Every holy shrine of the Muslims has a caretaker, called a *mujawar*, to tend to it. So had Maula Ali. The *mujawar* had been fast asleep as judged by his bleary eyes. He came to the entrance to the shrine, stood beside the large board which prevented our entry and beckoned me in. I hesitated and pointed to the board so that he would know I was not a Muslim. He nodded his head as if to tell me, "I know, I know", but he was firm in inviting me to come in.

What about Henry Luschwitz who stood beside me? He could also come in, the *mujawar* seemed to say, yet not a word was spoken to either of us for he was still half asleep. So we went in, treading gently, because we were still unsure of ourselves. We walked into a small square with a stone floor, walled on four sides, but under the open skies, at the end of which was a column draped with garlands of flowers which had dried up in the scorching heat. The *mujawar* led us to the column and stood beside it, as if to indicate we had come to our destination. "What does this column stand for?" I asked him.

"Maula Ali came here to pray", the *mujawar* replied. "Behind this column there is on a stone the impression of the palm of his hand. Come here, I will show it to you". He asked me to follow him through the narrow space between the column and the wall in which the stone was set, upright, and hidden from view. I did. As I was going through, he

took my hand and placed it on the stone. It was a plaque standing erect and clearly I could feel the shape of a man's hand. As my hand rested on it, I felt a sudden throb and a strong pulsating feeling ran through my hand as it came in contact with the dent in the stone. The right hand of mine which Hazrat Ali had taken in the dream was touching his hand now. Closeness to Hazrat Ali first registered itself in this strange way.

Henry was also shown the dent in the stone, after me, in the same way. When he came out I asked him what he had felt. "The stone is uneven", he said.

"Did you get any other feeling?" I asked. Henry shook his head. Yet in my hand there clearly was a pulsating throb. I wondered at first whether it could have been because of the steep climb. But if that were the cause of the throb, it would not have stopped the moment contact was lost.

Where exactly it was that Hazrat Ali prayed or from which hill this stone was brought, I did not ask, but as I looked down from an opening in the wall onto the vast plateau below, casting my mind back through the years, I could see him come across the fields, a glow of light preceding him, lighting the path as he walked slowly by. I knew it was only my imagination working but as I had dreamed so vividly of him, he was so much alive, so much a person I knew, someone whom I could recognise if he were to walk by me again.

Then I turned to the column in front of the plaque and offered my prayers and my thanks for the help he had given me in the writing of my Nizam book. "You wanted me to write this book. Therefore I am writing it the way you would like it written. The rest I leave to you".

The *mujawar* was standing near me, still half asleep, leaning on the wall, his eyelids opening and closing.

"Were you asleep when we came?" I asked.

"Fast asleep", he replied. "This is my usual time for rest".

"Sorry", I said, "that we woke you up".

"You did not", the *mujawar* calmly replied, "Maula Ali did".

"He woke you up!", I said in surprise.

"Yes", the *mujawar* said. "He often speaks to me".

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'Get up, go to the door'."

I listened in absolute awe.

"Let them enter", he said. When I came to the door and saw that you were not Muslims, he said once again, 'Let them enter'. So I asked you to come in.

"How does he say this to you?"

"In my ear. I get an *awaaz*". *Awaaz* is the Urdu word for sound.

The *mujawar* went on to explain, "There is nothing unusual in this. There is an affinity between us *mujawars* who work day and night at a shrine and the holy spirit which is connected with each shrine. The great dead express their wish to us; we merely obey. We have no option but to obey".

"What would have happened if he had said nothing to you?"

"Nothing", he tersely replied. "I would have gone on sleeping". He indicated that this in fact was what he proposed to do when we left. I told Henry we should make a move and soon thereafter we began to descend the steps. The sun was going down. It was a trifle cooler now with a mild breeze blowing from the west.

At the foot of the steps I said my thanks to Hazrat Ali once again, for letting me in and drove back to Taraporevala's house having touched a new height that day in more ways than one.

An awareness came to me soon thereafter that Hazrat Ali was beginning to take a hand in the affairs of my life, the course of which was noticeably changing. It was by no means a luscious life of comfort; at times it had been far from it. It often became a life of trial and test of my faith in him, a faith which often has no logic or reason to back it up. It is just blind faith such as simple people

would have in the power and benevolence of this holy spirit who seemed to be at the foot of God and who by his prayers for the men and women who believed in him, had produced so much amelioration in human suffering. Whole destinies seemed to be shaped by his powerful prayers. It is his prayer which is so powerful if it is uttered on your behalf, yet repeatedly he has stressed to the men who have blindly followed him that it would be a sin to believe he is the Supreme Being. But a tremendous closeness to divinity is obviously there. And closeness to Hazrat Ali is one step towards the ultimate truth, the pursuit of which is the goal of all religious life.

Everything was not working well in *Current*, the paper Hazrat Ali helped me to found. I had begun to disagree on policy with the first Chairman of the company which was formed to publish my new weekly. He was a solicitor. We had known each other at school but we had lost touch. Our meeting again was accidental for he happened to be in the High Court when one of my cases was being fought. Later, he came forward to help me form the new company and invest his share in it.

But now there was an uncomfortable period, during which we were not able to see eye to eye on matters relating to the *Current*. This was distressing for me. I was already fighting the government, fighting to survive under considerable financial stress. The paper had received several bad jolts due to lack of managerial experience. With the newly developed tension on the board of directors, life became difficult for me.

During this strenuous period, I once became so depressed that I said to Baba, "Do what you like. You made me start this paper. It is your paper. You decide". I was so fed up I could not care less what happened to the paper or to me.

Some time passed and a stalemate continued. Then on Monday afternoon my chairman came in, looking I thought a little more cheerful than he had been for several weeks. He finished signing cheques, had a discussion with our accountant and then came over to my table. We used to sit in the same room.

"Switch on the red light", he said, "I want to talk privately to you". A race book which he carried in his hand, he placed on my writing table in front of him. Horse racing was being held in Poona, 120 miles south east of Bombay. It was during the monsoon. I switched on my red light which automatically latched the door and waited for him to speak.

"I have come to tell you I do not wish to continue in the *Current* any more", he said.

I looked at him in surprise.

He continued, "Two very peculiar things have happened recently and I have decided to leave *Current*. You find a buyer for my shares at any reasonable price and I will opt out". He put out his hand for a friendly handshake.

We shook hands, then I leaned back in my chair somewhat relieved and asked, "What's happened?"

"I will tell you but on condition that it is not repeated to anyone". I gave that promise.

This in substance is what he told me: "Some days ago I had a peculiar dream. I saw an elderly lady in a white sari with long white hair. Standing behind her were three bearded men dressed in long white robes. The lady addressed me by name. She said, 'Don't you know me?' When I replied that I did not recognise her, she informed me she was your mother".

I felt a chill down my spine at the mention of my mother's name. In this context I knew who the three men in long white robes could be. But I said nothing. I continued to listen.

"Then your mother said, 'Why are you harrassing my son?' When I protested that I was not, she seemed angry and said, 'Leave him alone'."

I felt uncomfortable listening to his tale. I gave a slight nervous laugh to shake off my discomfort. Then he bluntly said, "You I can fight. But this!" he said, shaking his head, "this is a different matter, I admit. And that is not all. Yesterday I was returning by plane from Poona after the races. All the passengers had got into the plane and as we strapped ourselves in our seats all of a sudden the lights in the plane went off. In the darkness I heard a voice speak to me. He spoke in Hindi". My chairman picked up his race book turned to a page inside from which he read out the notes he had made of the words he had heard.

The voice said, "The time has come when your being in *Current* can no longer be fruitful either to you or to the paper. I would therefore advise you to leave in a friendly manner. Don't worry about the amount you will receive for your shares. I will help you to make eleven times more than what you will get for your shares. This, my son, is the advice of Mooshkel Aashan to you". As he finished speaking, the lights on the plane came on again.

I listened to this fantastic tale in absolute silence. I was struck dumb. First mother and the three men in long white robes, now the voice with a name to it.

I asked him, "Do you know who this person was whose voice you heard".

He referred to his race book again and said, "He said he was Mooshkel . . ."

"Yes", I interrupted him, "but do you know who that is?"

He said he did not, "That is Hazrat Ali, the man who once came to me in a dream".

"Could be", he said, but I don't think he realised how much this incident meant to me.

A few days later a man and his wife, good friends of ours dropped in at our house. Somehow he brought up the subject of how *Current* was progressing and about the chairman of my company with whom he had heard I had had disagreements. Then, out of the blue, he asked, "what is his shareholding in the paper?"

"Thirty-one thousand rupees", I replied for I knew the figure of every shareholder's investment in my company.

"Tell him if he wants to sell, I'll buy his shares for Rs. 11,000".

The next day in the office I communicated the offer to my chairman and it was immediately accepted. The shares were transferred soon thereafter. I had to become chairman of the company for there was no one else willing to take on the job, but I have always regarded my designation as editor as being the more important.

By the time it came to my writing this chapter I asked my former chairman whether in view of the long passage of time he would let me use this story. Very readily, he agreed, saying, "I lift the ban".

Soonamai had once mentioned to me that she would be very pleased if I were to dedicate one of my books to her after her death.

"Why after your death, *mai*?" I replied. "Why not in your lifetime?"

"No, son. Not now", she laughingly protested. "But after my death it would make me very happy".

"*Fabulous Mogul* will be dedicated to you", I said, overruling her protests. And it was. The dedication read: "To SOONA ERANEE who showed the way". Derek Verschoyle who published my earlier book, *Nehru, the Lotus Eater from Kashmir*, was to publish *Fabulous Mogul* and I was to be in London for publication day. In the middle of publication, Verschoyle suddenly sold out his business to André Deutsche and after several date changes, I was informed by Deutsche of the new date of publication. I still flew to London as arranged even though the date of publication changed twice. The night before the book came out I returned to my service apartment in Curzon Street after a late theatre. Just as I was opening the front door, I was

handed an urgent cable which a telegraph boy had delivered. It was for me and it was from India. It informed me that *mai* was dead. She had passed away after a brief illness. Those who were at her bedside when she died told me later that she must have seen someone a few moments before her death, for she raised her left hand, lifted her head, leaned forward in her bed and audibly said the words, "Yes, I am ready". Then she dropped her head, fell back on the pillow and life ebbed out of her peacefully.

Mai had told me once that she could leave this world whenever she wanted to go. Did Hazrat Ali come to fetch her? Or did the saint at Kakori come, the one who gave her the gift of contact with Hazrat Ali? That we will never know.

My book was released in London the next day, dedicated to her but it was strange that the dedication appeared after her death as she had wished, not during her lifetime as was my intention.

It was July 1955.

One slave less

TWO INDIVIDUALS in different parts of the world seemed aware of what I was doing in my country. The first of these was an American, the second a Ukranian emigre.

The American was Ed Murrow.

In the late 1960's a high ranking official in the U.S. foreign service came to India. He indicated a desire to meet me. I had recently come through a serious illness and was shortly leaving for Iraq and Iran. I was in no mood to see anyone. I, therefore, made polite excuses to him. Then I received a letter from him which said:

"Several years ago, I was a participant in the United States inter-departmental seminar held in Washington, D.C. The late President John F. Kennedy had placed great emphasis upon this seminar for all senior foreign service officers so that they would be conversant not only with the latest policies of the United States government, but also the reason for the formulation of such policies.

"One of the guest speakers at the seminar was the late Edward R. Murrow, whom I had earlier met when he made his initial swing through my area. After his formal remarks, Mr. Murrow and I got together for a brief cup of coffee. Mr. Murrow asked me if I was returning to Asia. I told him I was not, because I had received another assignment instead. He expressed surprise at this as he knew that I had spent a considerable number

of years in Asia. He said he was particularly anxious for a member of the foreign service with the experience I possessed to become acquainted with a man whom he considered to be one of the outstanding journalists and publishers in all of Asia.

"Mr. Murrow went on to state that he had heard that this man had virtually single-handedly fought to preserve the freedom of the press in India and had fought without quarter all attempts to muzzle it. He said that this person had been and was a rigorous exponent of democracy but had retained his journalistic independence which gave him license to denounce those persons who might attempt to take advantage of the democratic process to serve their own ends... He said that he had never met this person, but had nevertheless continued to admire from afar his courage, honesty, and professional capability. The person to whom Mr. Murrow was referring was yourself".

Ed Murrow was no ordinary person. Best known as a news analyst, his was the radio voice from London for C.B.S. during the war. He was a natural reporter, self-trained with a reputation for accuracy. His objective views on international affairs were in great demand not only in his own country but all over the English-speaking world.

The Ukrainian was a fabulous character, wrapped in mystery. His name was Georgi S. Okolovich. He was a man with a mission to perform. Krushchev, when he was Prime Minister of the U.S.S.R., paid Okolovich a rare compliment by declaring him "Enemy No. 1". He may thus be rated as one of the most effective anti-communists of our time.

Okolovich was closely connected with an organisation known as the N.T.S., initials which in Russian stood for "Union of National Solidarists". From sketchy reports it is learned that the N.T.S., was originally formed by a number of Ukrainians who had left Soviet Russia at different times. They banded together and endeavoured to keep in touch with their country of birth by methods which were quite

daring. After the war, the N.T.S., established itself more forcefully in Munich, West Germany, which then became its headquarters. Okolovich was the mastermind guiding its movements.

Despite the security precautions of a communist dictatorship, the N.T.S., succeeded in establishing and maintaining a regular courier service in and out of Russia. The N.T.S., was quick to find out what was happening in the Soviet Union, and relayed the news back to the people of Russia on their underground *Radio Liberty*, and to the people of the satellite countries over *Radio Free Europe*. The activities of the N.T.S., and Okolovich's open defiance of Soviet authority proved so demoralising to Soviet leaders that the Kremlin's nerves were reduced to a frazzle. The result was not confined to words and opinions; there were numerous attempts on Okolovich's life. Okolovich came close to being 'liquidated' when an N.K.V.D. man set on his trail, got close enough to attempt to assassinate him. But the assassin changed his mind and instead informed Okolovich of his mission. Aware that the Soviets had now established a base in Munich, Okolovich moved his N.T.S. establishment to Frankfurt-am-Main, where it was encircled by electrified barbed wire fences and guarded round the clock by fierce watch dogs. These precautions were vital; the men who worked for N.T.S., were aware that if caught they would pay with their lives. Only the N.T.S., knew how many of their men were caught and killed.

In the mid-1960's a worried Indian came to my office. I had known him before but I had no idea what he did. At my office desk, he nervously puffed a cigarette. While my secretary was in the room, he seemed reluctant to speak. When she left he said, "I have just returned from Europe". Then, lowering his voice he told me he had been to Germany. "I met Okolovich in Frankfurt".

"Who is he?" I asked, not having heard the name before. It was then I learned about this short, stocky Ukrainian, strongly built, whose age was 'over sixty' exuding toughness and rated by Krushchev as 'Enemy No. 1'.

"He has paid you a rare compliment", my visitor said.

"Me?" I asked in surprise. "Okolovich paid me a compliment?"

"Yes, you".

"But how would he know me?"

"Your paper. He has seen it. He read the report in *Current* on the Tarasov case". Tarasov was the Russian sailor who jumped ship in Calcutta harbour and asked the Indian government for asylum. The Nehru government felt embarrassed by the sailor's request lest it offend the Soviet government; the Indian judiciary upheld Tarasov's right to defect. My visitor continued, "Okolovich does not know English but articles in your paper are translated to him". It was gratifying to know we had penetrated into such secret places, far out of India, and that we were known to a man with a price on his head.

"That's not all", my visitor said. "Okolovich said in Russian: 'Tell him — this man in India who edits this paper', he picked up a copy of *Current* as he spoke these words — 'my mantle will descend on him'." At first I was speechless; then I laughed.

"Don't laugh", the visitor said. "This is perhaps the biggest compliment you have ever been paid. I heard those words myself — spoken in Russian. They were translated for me. I came to give you this message: carry on".

"Carry on!" I repeated the words so easy to utter. It was like asking a lone man to hold a vital mountain pass with a pop gun.

When I went home that night, I lit an incense stick and prayed. A whiff of smoke from the *agarbatti* blew towards me, even though the air was absolutely still. That is his code sign to say, "I have heard you, son". At least I have come to believe it is.

Soon after independence, India began to show itself receptive to the advances of communism. It stemmed from the growth of Soviet influence in India for which there were two main causes. One was Mr. Nehru's foreign policy, high principled but not consistently followed, least of all by himself. Nehru's neutrality like the tower to Pisa, was intended to stand erect, but due to faulty construction it leaned too much to one side. The other cause was that despite the massive aid given to India by the United States, its administration acted in constant fear of being misunderstood by the Indian leaders. Although America was rushing all manner of food and economic aid to India, many times more than the comparatively meagre Soviet contribution, Americans always seem frightened lest they be accused of meddling in India's internal affairs. U.S. ships bringing massive shipments of foodgrains unloaded bags of wheat and corn on the docks and steamed off again before the Indian had time to say his word of thanks. This was because Mr. Nehru had coined his famous phrase, 'no strings attached'.

The Soviets ignored Mr. Nehru's flowery verbiage. They gave a different kind of help to India, often directly channelled to political organisations and newspapers owing loyalty to them and controlled by men trained to be 'leaders' in the event of a communist takeover of India. The Soviet rupee account was freely used to propagate the idea that the Soviet Union was a peaceloving country, guarding the freedom of the 'underdogs' of the world from the machinations of the 'bloody imperialists'. The savage crushing of the Hungarian revolt in 1956, the tanks of the Warsaw Pact powers in Prague mowing down the Dubcek regime, were liberation movements. Nehru who loudly condemned Suez, spoke in such muted tones about Soviet barbarism in crushing the Hungarian revolt, that he could hardly have heard his own faint words of mild reproach.

As Soviet propaganda was intensified in India, it was evident that the target of the U.S.S.R. was the Indian now sparkling with literacy though untouched by education. It

was already a thrill for the newly-liberated Indian to be able to sign his name for the packet containing his meagre monthly wages, whereas generations before him could only do business with thumb prints. His signature was a status symbol. It qualified him for a bride with a higher dowry. Dowries were abolished by law, just as was untouchability. But it is one thing to put a new law on the statute book, quite another to enforce it.

During Nehru's seventeen year term as Prime Minister he had allowed the communists to gain control of the state of Kerala in the south. Nehru was bighearted! He maintained that if the communists came to power on a democratic vote, they should have the same right to rule as any other political party, including his own, the Congress. To the question, "Would the communists when they come to power continue to follow democratic processes?", there was no answer.

To those who had some knowledge of the political topography of India, West Bengal with its earlier known attraction for terrorism seemed next on the list, ripe and ready to instal a communist regime on a democratic vote. So it happened some years later. But instead of the pictures of Lenin and Karl Marx, it was Mao's thoughts which decorated the walls of the main streets of the state capital, Calcutta.

To avoid the stigma of being labelled as 'meddling' the Americans gave aid to India without ascertaining where or how it was being distributed, channelled or utilised. Large tins of processed cheese still with the label: "For the people of India from the people of the United States" were sold by men ringing door-bells in the affluent residential areas of Bombay. They fetched Rs. 40 per tin. With the proceeds, cheap hooch was bought in the same prohibition city to drink to the health of the generous Americans.

With independence, came the first U.S. Ambassador to India, Henry F. Grady, a charming old man with easy manners and a broad outlook. I learned from him that Mr. Nehru had expressed his intention of appointing Mrs.

Pandit as free India's first Ambassador to the United States. His wish was communicated to Washington, but the reply disappointed Nehru. Nehru decided to send his sister to Moscow instead!

In 1949, the Truman administration relented and Mrs. Pandit became *persona grata*. By then Loy W. Henderson came for his two-year posting to the American Embassy in New Delhi. I met him in Bombay, a tight-lipped career diplomat, careful not to speak except in measured sentences which conveyed very little. I asked him what interest the U.S. had in India. Mr. Henderson tried to impress upon me that India was strategically of no use to the United States. He was thinking at that time perhaps only in terms of military bases.

That however, did not answer the question I had in mind. I wanted to know the value the U.S. attached to India as a base for sustaining democratic thought in an Asia which was fast turning Red. Mr. Henderson indicated the U.S. would do nothing which might be construed as interference with the internal problems of India.

No Indian has wanted the Americans to interfere in our internal affairs but the U.S., attitude as outlined by Henderson indicated that the land lay wide open for communist propaganda to filter through. This would eventually destroy the treasured possession of free India, its young democracy. Mr. Henderson could only think of war in terms of guns and bomber planes. I was more concerned with the greater war for the mind of the Indian which, I clearly saw, had yet to be fought. That was the war I wanted to win for my countrymen, a war which could not be won without an ally.

As I came to the end of a half hour with Loy Henderson, I made an observation which I vividly recall. I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I gather that America does not consider India important because according to U.S., military assessment it has no value. But have you considered our country in terms of its manpower?"

The ambassador listened.

I went on: "Today there are 600 million Chinese re-

conciled to communism. If you add to this figure, the 450 million people of India,¹ you have a huge mass of humanity opposed to the democratic idea which you are striving to preserve in the world. In a war between yourselves and communism in the future, how do you propose to eliminate this mass of humanity? Can you just wipe them out as you did Hiroshima? Would American public opinion stand by and silently watch the obliteration of over a thousand million human beings?"

I was obviously not wrong about American public opinion as judged from their revulsion over My Lai, a tiny village of Vietnam. So that almost a quarter century ago I was drumming home the point that as a base in the fight for the preservation of democracy, the west could not afford to ignore my country.

Mr. Henderson did not expect this barrage. As I got up to leave, I said, "There is a solid feeling of friendship in this country for the American people today. It would be criminal if it were to go over to communist Russia". Henderson left soon thereafter for Tehran and there was no change in U.S. policy.

I was not thinking of the Americans; I was striving all the time for my countrymen who because of their illiteracy would be such easy prey for communist propaganda. It was already seeping through the bookstalls of India where Soviet literature was sold at give-away prices, through the Indian press where some of our half-starved journalists seemed delighted to get sozzled on lashings of free vodka, thumping each other on the back with hearty exchanges of '*toyarich*'. I could see it coming. It would be the undoing of my country. It would convert our beautiful freedom into the ugly status of a Soviet colony. Yet the biggest prop of democracy in the world, which was the might, the power and the resources of the United States, was not interested in India.

While they were not willing to make a constructive effort

¹ The population figure at the time of partition.

to build a solid democratic base it seemed that they were willing to stage spasmodic though covert attempts to attack Nehru because of his professed neutrality. Only a few weeks before my meeting with Henderson, there had been a clumsy approach made to me. It was in the uncouth American tradition of 'I'll buy you a drink'. As Nehru, who did not relish criticism of himself, had no love left for me, I could not report this incident to him. To sit quiet would have spoilt my name. I decided to write directly to the people of America through the columns of the *New York Times*.

My letter published in this paper on July 25, 1951, read:
To the Editor of the *New York Times*:

The Asian scene is very important to the United States of America. My country, India, is about the last foothold which the democracies have in this area, fast reddening under the surrounding Soviet influences.

It is necessary, therefore, that the American public and the United States State Department pay some attention to the quality of the men whom they send out to this part of the world to represent the United States in the consular and information services.

Your country's representation is ably led by your Ambassador, Loy Henderson, but it is not the Ambassador who comes into daily contact with representative Indians, whose reactions will condition the relationship between our two countries.

Let me give you an example: Some weeks ago there came to the office of my newspaper, the *Current* a member of the United States Information Service. He had come to congratulate me on a front page article of ours entitled 'War is Inevitable', which criticized Prime Minister Nehru for his policy of neutralism, which we felt was untenable in view of the fight America was putting up against the inevitability of war. We were told that this article should be more widely read in India, and presuming that he was requesting a release of copyright so that his organisation, the U.S.I.S. would get a chance

to reprint it, I said that I had no objection to such a release.

This, however, was not what was in the mind of your young representative. He wanted our paper ostensibly to take the initiative of further spreading the message of the article, and said that the expenses involved would be looked after.

I feel that there must be something very wrong in the caliber and the quality of the United States officials who are sent out here when one of them should feel himself to be in a position to make such a suggestion to the Editor of a paper anywhere in the world. The Asiatic and the Indian in particular, is very resentful of this kind of dollar patronage. It helps your country little and it leaves those of us who are inclined to be friendly toward you somewhat disgusted with a United States policy in which your officials are allowed to behave like this.

I, therefore, venture to suggest through the columns of your paper that your State Department institute an inquiry into the calibre and quality of some of the men who are representing you here, to see if a more responsible type of official cannot be entrusted with the delicate task of representing the United States of America in this part of the world. Public relations between the United States of America and India are most important at this juncture and anything that can be done from either side to further them should be accepted in good faith.

D. F. KARAKA

It was not so accepted. The local American representation soured as was evident from the dossier which, in time was built up on me in the Department of State, Washington, D.C. According to this dossier I had four wives!

It September 1958 I was in America once again. Indian

big business wanted me to cover the first visit abroad of India's Finance Minister, Morarji Desai, the same individual with whom I had played hide and seek in the law courts of Bombay. Desai was on his way to the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' conference in Montreal.

In order to ensure that I would not have to wait too long for my visa, I called on Mr. Ellsworth Bunker, then American Ambassador in New Delhi. Subsequently the vice-consul in Bombay who stamped my passport remarked, while escorting me to the lift, that he had never issued a visa so fast.

Mr. Bunker gave me letters of introduction to two people in the United States, one of whom was Mr. Sherman Adams, special aide to the President of the United States.¹ The day before the interview I flew back from Montreal to see in the papers that Mr. Sherman Adams was to make an important announcement in a special broadcast that evening. He had at the time been heavily criticised for having accepted the hospitality of a businessman and the gift of a Vicuna coat. I was afraid that in the broadcast he would announce his resignation. At a cocktail party that evening I switched on the radio to listen to Mr. Adam's broadcast. My fears were well-founded. Mr. Adams resigned. Why on that day when I was to see him the next morning?

I put through a call to Washington, to the White House to the office of Mr. Sherman Adams. Miss Green, his secretary, was still working. She had fixed the appointment for me. I told her I had just listened to Mr. Adam's broadcast. I had rung to check whether my appointment the next morning was still on. In a chirpy voice she replied, "Oh yes, we are still in business. Governor Adams is looking forward to meeting you". I was on the plane to Washington the next morning.

At the airport I got into a cab and asked to be driven to a cafe as close as possible to the White House. I spent the hour which was at my disposal in drinking coffee, having a wash and a brush-up, a shoe-shine and in collecting

¹ Eisenhower

my thoughts before my meeting. Five minutes before the appointed time I hailed a cab outside the cafe.

"Where to?" the driver asked.

"You see that house over there", I said pointing to the best known house in the United States.

"That's the White House", the cabbie said.

"That's where I want to go", I told him.

He curtly replied, "It's too early in the morning to joke mister". Then, humouring me, he asked in a more friendly voice, "Now, where to?"

"It's still the White House", I replied. "I have an appointment with Governor Adams. It would not look nice if I arrived on foot, would it?"

"Governor Adams! But he resigned yesterday".

"That's right", I said. "He happens to want to see me before he leaves. Now don't be frightened, drive to the gate and they will let us in".

Very dubiously he started off. The guard at the gate came forward and peered through the cab window. I gave my name and that of the person I was to see. Miss Green had been superbly efficient. Like a Sultan of the Orient, I was smoothly wafted in. As I paid off the driver, he leaned forward and in a more subdued tone said, "Sorry, your excellency. I thought you was joking".

I walked up a few steps, waited a brief while in an ante-room and precisely at 11 a.m., I was shown into Mr. Adams's office.

I spent an hour in the White House that morning in 1958. At the end of that interesting meeting, Governor Adams picked up the phone and asked for George Allen of the U.S.I.A.¹ In his absence he spoke to his deputy, whose name was Washburn.

"Washburn", he said, "I have been listening for an hour to a viewpoint on India which I think you should hear".

The U.S.I.A. heard me, fussed over me, lunched me and gave me a high powered car to catch my plane at Washington airport back to New York. But there was still no under-

¹ U.S. Information Agency.

standing at a level below Governor Adams of the role America should play on the sub-continent of India.

My argument has been the same ever since Independence. While the U.S. government readily fell in line with Mr. Nehru's dictum that Aid to India should have 'no strings attached', it appeared to overlook the fact that parcels which are not properly tied with string, produce an inordinate amount of leakage and consequent waste on their journey from the giver of the Aid to the Indian who is meant to receive it.

There is, moreover, a fixation in the mind of the American administration that the Indians are a hungry people, that they are economically underdeveloped and that therefore food, machinery and know-how are India's only needs. Food, of which America had some to spare, has been a welcome gift to our people. But it merely tided the Indian over from one season of food shortage to another. Old emaciated men and women lived a few years longer.

But there is a greater hunger in the younger generation of our country, particularly in rural areas where they crave knowledge, learning, science and technology, all the mental exercises which go to shape the human mind. There is a desire deep down in the Indian middle class to possess the fundamental components of that great but nebulous thing called 'freedom' which is sustained by democratic thought, by freedom of speech and expression. These hungers and yearnings, have to be understood by any giver of Aid before they can be appeased.

There is need for the aid-giving countries of the world to give India a more correct rating than that which American administrations have done. A better class of official, at all levels, needs to be sent by the democracies to this sensitive area of perpetual conflict between democratic forces and those of communism. A correct rating of India would wipe out the traditional concept that we are a people merely with hungry stomachs whose only need is a bowl of rice and a *chappati* made of imported wheat.

All through the years an Indian has been able to buy

books on the teachings of Lenin, Karl Marx, Engels, Trotsky and Bukharin — in addition to *Mao's Thoughts* of course, at a nominal cost which he could afford because the sale of all communist literature is openly subsidised in India by the Soviet Union. Eight volumes of Karl Marx cost only Rs. 16, less than a pound sterling.

But there is no book on Abraham Lincoln, on Jefferson, on Citizen Tom Payne, on Woodrow Wilson or more recently John F. Kennedy at a price the Indian can afford. There are no American bookshops in India subsidised by the U.S. government which sell literature on the democratic way of life.

In a speech to the American Men's Club in Bombay in 1970 when I was invited to address them, I said.

"There is no understanding that America is still at war, that one of the battlefields is the sub-continent of India and that this is not a war for acquiring territories or military bases; it is a war for the mind of the Indian, a war which I am painfully constrained to observe America is slowly losing in my country".

The applause this remark received from American businessmen and bankers present, was fulsome. The Chief guest at the lunch, who was the U.S. Ambassador, Senator Keating, however, went red in the face. U.S. officials from the consulate and the U.S.I.S. sat glum.

I concluded my speech with the words:

"If Americans have a function to perform in my country other than to trade, they should be aware that resistance to communism is the most important problem of India today".

A year later Mrs. Gandhi signed a Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union and President Nixon ordered the U.S., nuclear carrier, the *Enterprise*, to sail into the Bay of Bengal.

The Soviet reaction to me was different. In the early

stages they tended to ignore my paper until *Current* started to break some of the most damaging stories about the Soviet Union and the Indian communist party. The most important of these was our scoop in publishing what came to be known as 'The Dange Letter'.

Dange was Chairman of the Communist Party of India, known by its initials, C.P.I. He was handpicked by the Kremlin for this key job. We were able to ascertain that while serving a jail sentence in 1924 in connection with a conspiracy case, this great comrade had written a revealing letter to the British Viceroy, the original of which was still in the archives. While there was more than one letter from Mr. Dange, we reproduced a particularly incriminating one. It read:

Your Excellency,

I am one of the four in the Bolshevik Conspiracy Case of Cawnpore. I beg to put forward for your Excellency's consideration a prayer for the remission of my sentence for following reasons.

In submitting my prayer I have to refer to certain facts, which your Excellency may not be cognizant of; but Your Excellency can verify their truth by referring to Col. C. Kaye, Director, Central Intelligence Bureau or to the persons mentioned hereinafter.

When the above referred case was proceeding in the lower court Mr. Ross Alston, the learned counsel for the prosecution, happened to have a side talk with me, during the course of which he remarked: Government is not very particular about the punishment of the individual accused. The case is instituted only to prove to a doubting public the truth of government's statements, made from time to time as to the existence of Bolshevik conspiracy in India. I think the learned counsel is not likely to have misrepresented Your Excellency's policy, as he was in too close a touch with government officials to have mistaken government's intentions. As the position of Your Excellency's government has been vindicated by the verdict of the court, Your Excellency may not mind

remitting my sentence and granting my prayer.

I might also refer to another incident. Exactly one year back, the Deputy Commissioner of Police of Bombay, Mr. Stewart was having a conversation with me in his office, regarding my relations with Mr. M. N. Roy and an anticipated visit to me of certain persons from abroad. During the course of the conversation, the honourable officer let drop a hint in the following words, the full import of which I failed to catch at that moment. Mr. Stewart said, 'You hold an exceptionably influential position in certain circles here and abroad. Government would be glad if this position would be of some use to them'. I think I still hold that position. Rather it has been enhanced by the prosecution. If Your Excellency is pleased to think that I should use that position for the good of your Excellency's government and the country I should be glad to do so, if I am given the opportunity by Your Excellency granting my prayer for release.

I am given the punishment of ~~four years~~ rigorous imprisonment in order that those years may bring a salutary change in my attitude towards the King Emperor's sovereignty in India. I beg to inform Your Excellency that those years are unnecessary, as I have never been positively disloyal towards His Majesty in my writings or speeches nor do I intend to be so in future.

Hoping this respectful undertaking will satisfy and move Your Excellency to grant my prayer and awaiting anxiously a reply.

I beg to remain,
Your Excellency's
most obedient servant,
SHRIPAD AMRIT DANGE¹.

The publication of this letter had the effect of a nuclear blast in India's political world. Its fall-out set some of the top communist leaders in India charging each other with being quislings, renegades, scabs and scoundrels. Nothing

¹ *Current*, March 7, 1964.

could have been more embarrassing to the Soviets than that the Chairman of the political party they nursed in India, had professed such loyalty to the King Emperor and thus proved himself to be a traitor to the cause of Indian nationalism in the earliest days of our struggle for freedom.

To counteract the devastating effect of the publication of this letter, the C.P.I.'s central committee immediately issued a statement to the press in which *Current* was mentioned by name. Our story was denounced as being utterly false and without foundation and the letter we had published was called a forgery, perpetrated by the British! It was categorically stated that legal action would be taken against us for this scurrilous attempt to damage the good name of their great leader. The C.P.I., threatened to silence 'the scandalmongers' of *Current*.

I had to do some quick thinking. I had stuck my neck out by printing it. The Indian who brought it to me was absolutely reliable, but all I knew about the man who had given it to him was that he was a communist disillusioned with the Soviet Union and 'its Indian stooges'. His reason for handing over the Dange letters to *Current*, was that we were 'the only paper in India with the guts to publish them'. Guts we certainly had for we were aware that if this Dange letter was fake and a plant on us, we would be sufficiently discredited to be put out of business. No checking of the authenticity of the Dange letter was possible for that would have destroyed the scoop. Also, as the original was reported to be still in the archives, premature disclosure of its existence would have given the communists an opportunity to destroy it.

I dictated the story to my secretary. Before sending it to press for setting up, I brought the type-script home and placed it overnight on the prayer table in my house. When I picked it up again the next morning, I noticed some flower petals had fallen on it from the vase on the table. I decided to go ahead and print it.

This peculiar ritual of leaving papers on the prayer table overnight was my own amateur way of seeking guidance.

On another occasion when I had left a draft of an agreement on the prayer table in the same way, the top of a lighted incense stick fell on it during the night and burned a large hole in a relevant portion of the agreement, I felt it was an indication that I should not sign it, a direction which later proved to be very correct.

Despite the denial and the threats contained in the C.P.I., statement, I was therefore not unduly worried, aware of the habits of communists which were not dissimilar to those of the Nazis of the last war: loud denials, then big bombastic threats. Noise generally frightens the other side, the communists believe. That is why the communists always shout their demands; they never plead quietly whether their case is strong or weak. In any case it was too late to be worried. I waited for the threatened legal action to follow. I watched the moves the communists made and I noticed that while the party was denouncing the published letter as a forgery, Dange himself was maintaining a studied silence over it. A few days later, we got word from our informant that as a result of our story Mr. Dange had hurriedly flown to Moscow — 'for consultations'. We checked with the airline and it was confirmed he had left. Then I heaved a sigh of relief.

We kept quiet thereafter, leaving it to the government and the rest of the press to pursue the story which we were the first to break. The government announced in parliament that as a precaution, the relevant letters had been removed from the archives and put under the safe keeping of the Home Ministry. Thereafter, some eighty M.P.s requested leave to inspect the 'Dange letters' in order to satisfy themselves about their authenticity. They were allowed to do so and the signature thereon was verified by some of his closest colleagues as being unquestionably Dange's. This wrecked for all time the political reputation of this Moscow-backed communist leader, even though he was retained in office to save the party's face. Moreover, as a direct result of this revelation, the communist party split into two: the faction which retained the old name, C.P.I., continued under

the tutelage of Moscow but a newly formed wing called the C.P.M., emerged. These initials stood for Communist Party (Marxist). This wing drew inspiration alternately from Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara. The Soviets began to treat me very seriously thereafter.

With the success the Soviets had achieved in India with their communist henchmen infiltrating our young democracy because of the inertia of the educated Indian, I began to wonder whether there was any purpose in continuing my lone crusade of making my country aware of the Soviet Union's expansionist aims. With rising costs, the struggle to keep *Current* going had begun to tell on my health; the strain was killing. Yet often when I was at my lowest, some tiny incident would occur which like the light which shone ahead of Hazrat Ali showed the way ahead.

So it happened one Saturday when a stranger called at our newspaper office soon after noon. He said he wanted to give Rs. 20¹ to our Donations account to which readers contributed to reduce our financial loss which we had written about in our columns. The office girl who collected the two ten-rupee notes came in to tell me this man was a foreigner and that he had expressed a wish to see me for just a minute. As I was not very busy, it being an unusually quiet Saturday, and a half-day for our office, I called him in.

A young man in his late twenties with very fine features, dressed in a brown, light-weight suit, walked into my room. He wore large, dark glasses, so his eyes were well-covered. He sat nervously before me across my table and kept looking at me without saying a word. To begin conversation, I thanked him for his gift to my paper.

"It is nothing", he said in a continental accent. "I wish I could have given more. It is only a token of my appreciation of what you have done for me".

¹ Little over £ 1

I leaned back in my chair. I could not recollect having done anything for this man. "Do I know you?" I asked him.

"No, you don't", he replied, "but you seem to know the feelings of those of us who suffer under communist regimes. While you do not know us, we know you. My wife and I who are trapped here in India, have read your paper every week for many months. I am one of those whose lives you have directly influenced".

He looked at me, then he removed his glasses as if to show me the sincerity on his face and the deep suffering expressed in his eyes. Then he put his glasses on again.

"How have I influenced you?" I asked.

"Because you have given me the courage I need to take the road to freedom", he replied. He went on, "I am taking our future into both my hands in the hope of making a new life for ourselves. If we are caught on the way, we will be dead people. If we get through, we shall live".

It was an embarrassing moment, with this young man sitting before me who could be dead in the next few days because of me.

"Have you made up your mind to go through with your idea, whatever it is?" I asked.

"I have. That is why I came here to see the man who means so much to us".

I was lost for words. While I admired his courage, I thought his chances of escape were slender.

Then he got up to leave. He put out his hand to say 'good-bye', still a stranger without a name or a destination. I only knew he was on his way to freedom.

When he reached the door of my office, he stopped. He removed his glasses once again and smiled at me. Then he left.

I prayed for that man and his family for many months thereafter but I heard nothing, absolutely nothing from him or about him. One day a cryptic message arrived, typewritten on a blank sheet of paper. It read: "With the courage your words gave us, we reached freedom safely".

It had no name, no address, no signature. The postmark on the envelope was Indian. He must have sent it to some friend in India to mail to me.

"One slave less", I audibly said to myself reading that message I had received, and when I said my thanks at the prayer table before turning into bed that night I became strangely aware of having created, from the rubble of humanity, a free man.

21

At Najaf

IT BEGAN with a stone in the kidney in 1968. The x-ray showed it was the size and shape of a pigeon's egg. An operation became inevitable. We fixed the day for July 8, two days after my wife's birthday. Because of my cardiac condition I had been given for many years an anti-coagulant which made me a bleeder. In addition I had diabetes. The doctors listed the lab tests they required and brushed aside my warning that sometimes I produced an allergy to insulin. They said, "Not to worry; we will desensitise you".

On July 7, some time before lunch, my wife and I decided to drive to the other end of town to call on Tehmi before I checked in at the nursing home. There were two reasons for this: I had not seen Tehmi for several weeks; I wanted to say my prayers at Soonaimai's original prayer table before I went for my operation.

Soon after I came out of the prayer room, my wife said she would also like to go in. So she did. Later we said goodbye to Tehmi and drove back to our end of town to the nursing home. I sat in the front of the car near the driver; my wife in a corner at the back. As I felt she might be worrying over my operation I turned to her and said, "Don't worry, darling, everything will be all right".

"I'm not worried", she replied. "I know it will be all right". Her confident tone surprised me for, from little things she had earlier said and done, she had seemed deeply anxious about me. I asked her how she could say this with

so much conviction. To which she quietly replied, "*Bawa* has told me you'll be all right". As this was the first time she had said anything like this, I asked her, "When did he tell you this?"

She leaned forward. "When I was in the prayer room at Tehmi's and I was quietly praying, I said, '*Bawa*, he is going for his operation, please give him back to me alive'. Then I lit some incense sticks and said a few words of prayer. My eyes must have been closed when I heard a voice in my ears saying, 'You don't need to ask for that. He will come safely through it'. The words were absolutely clear and there was no one in the room except myself".

"Has this ever happened to you before?" I asked.

"Never", she replied. "So I am not worried any more". While I believed what my wife said, the experience she so calmly narrated was most strange to me. We drove to the nursing home and I was shown into the room reserved for me. It must have been around noon now. Soon a pretty little Anglo-Indian nurse tripped in. She had light blue eyes and nut brown, silky-textured hair. She was a snooty little girl, who kept herself extremely aloof. She injected some five drops of insulin into my bottom and went out. My wife sat near my bed, waiting to see if the injection produced any reaction. Ten minutes later, the nurse came in again and asked, "Do you feel anything?" I replied in the negative. She injected ten drops of insulin this time and went away again.

When another ten minutes had passed, she returned once again to give me the rest of the injection, adding, "Now you have your lunch. Who said you were allergic to insulin?" A ward boy came in with a trayful of lunch soon thereafter and I had a few mouthfuls of food when the allergy to the insulin began to manifest itself very noticeably. My lips and face began to swell. My wife rang for the nurse. "There you are", I said. "There's your de-sensitisation coming up in a nice rash". All the composure dropped from her and she took quick action. Within minutes the resident medical officer was at my bedside, as also the

senior sister in charge of the ward. An anti-histamine injection was quickly shot into me to counteract the swelling. Not long thereafter other doctors came in, the surgeon, the physician and some housemen. "How are we going to operate on you tomorrow?" one of them asked me.

"I told you boys I was a freak, but you wouldn't listen". From then on they began to pay a little more attention to what I said. The anaesthetist came in later that afternoon. By way of introduction he said, "I read a number of your books when I was in medical college, so I feel I know you. Now tell me about yourself".

"Doctor", I said, "I am a person who does not like being pushed. Ever since I was a child I have had a built-in resistance to any shock. If you give me sodium pentathol or whatever anaesthetic you propose to give me, give it to me slowly and my system will absorb it and respond the way you want. But if you try to hustle me and knock me out too soon, I will unconsciously resist. Remember that".—Later there was a re-check of my blood sugar. With pills and strict diet it had come under control and, after a conference, it was decided that the operation would be performed as scheduled the next morning. My surgeon looked in once again late that night. He said, "Normally I would take only forty-five minutes to remove a kidney stone but I intend to take double the time for yours".

The next morning came and as I was being made ready for the operation theatre, feeling heavily doped with pethedine injected into me, I turned to my wife and said, "I have a feeling I am going to give a little trouble this time. But don't worry, I will pull through. I am certain about that". Then I dropped off to sleep and was wheeled into the operating theatre.

The operation took four hours; the kidney stone having crumbled into tiny bits as it was being removed. As a result the kidney had to be thoroughly washed. Despite this, a tiny particle crept into the ureter. My blood sugar shot up; so did my acetone to several plus-pluses. I was still under heavy anaesthesia and my condition that night

became serious. The doctors could not risk giving me insulin, but they were also afraid of what would happen to me if I were to go into a diabetic coma.

Some days later I persuaded my doctors to allow me to go home where I could be more comfortable in surroundings familiar to me. My twelve-inch cut would not heal and then there was talk of a second operation. On the eleventh day, however, the acute pain which I continuously had, suddenly subsided, the particle of stone which had blocked the ureter passed through and the open wound started healing. That evening when the night nurse came on duty, she knelt beside my bed and made the sign of the cross before undoing my bandage. "After eleven days, it suddenly heals in a few hours. How can that be?"

From early that year I had begun to feel a craving to visit the tomb of Hazrat Ali which I knew was in Najaf somewhere near Baghdad in Iraq. After the operation, as I got better, the urge to go to Najaf became more intense. "*Baba*, let me come to you", I kept pleading with him in my prayers night after night. There was, however, not a signal nor a sign from him.

On the same street where we lived was the residence of Abbas Nadjm, the Consul General for Iran and his wife. We knew them well. One day he rang up to ask whether I felt well enough to drop in informally that evening along with my family for caviar and a glass of champagne, to meet his Ambassador from New Delhi. As I was feeling so much better, we decided to go.

In the course of conversation, the Iranian Ambassador casually remarked that a visit to his country, which was the land of my ancestors, would be a good way to convalesce. "I invite you to my country", he said. I replied, "I am tempted to accept because I so much want to go to nearby Iraq, to visit Najaf".

"That is only next door", the Ambassador emphasised. Iran incidentally has many hundred thousand devout followers of Hazrat Ali.

So began the idea of a combined visit to Iran and Iraq.

I toyed with the idea over that week-end and on Monday I telephoned the Iraq Consul General and asked if I could have an appointment to meet him. I was invited over for coffee. There had been some internal political disturbances in his country and, unknown to me, confidential instructions had been sent to all Iraqi consulates that no journalists should be given visas to enter Iraq. The Consul General could not tell me about this restriction. He asked what was the purpose of my visit to his country. Innocently, I got up, lifted my bush shirt and showed him my long curving scar. "You see this", I said. "Hazrat Ali healed that. I want to go to Najaf to say my thanks to him".

"Hazrat Ali?" the Consul said, surprised that I even knew his name.

"Yes, Hazrat Ali", I repeated. "He came to me in a dream fourteen years ago".

"But you are not Muslim. Why would Hazrat Ali come to you?"

"Don't ask me why", I replied. The Consul General whose name was Hammad said he would write to Baghdad and obtain the necessary permission for me. But as he told me later, he was certain nothing could be done in view of the notification from Baghdad which had clearly banned visas for journalists. Believing that Hammad would be writing to Iraq, I started checking with the Iranian Consulate what dates would suit them for my visit to Tehran. After several discussions, exchanges of cables and messages through diplomatic channels, the plan emerged that I should first visit Tehran, then fly on to Baghdad. As the crow flies, Tehran was the closer of the two cities.

That settled I phoned the Iraq Consulate, urging the issue of an early visa. Hammad replied with a strange remark, "If Hazrat Ali wants you there, not even my government can stop you." He said he was coming over to my office to collect my passport. The reason Hammad made that odd remark and called on me was that without his writing to Baghdad, he had received a sudden flash message, rescinding the earlier ban on journalists. "Then I knew that

Hazrat Ali was inviting you", Hammad said. "And we who believe in Ali must respect his honoured guest."

Honoured guest! It felt good to be referred to in such terms. Hammad suggested that I fly first to Baghdad for there was a straight Bombay-Baghdad B.O.A.C. flight every Saturday morning at a most reasonable hour. After Najaf I could turn back to Tehran. As this plan was so much more convenient from the point of view of flight schedules, I asked the Iranians if I could alter the dates of my visit to Tehran. They were most co-operative. I therefore booked my seat with B.O.A.C. to Baghdad.

Nadim, the Iranian, while checking the various dates on his Persian calendar happened to remark, "It is a funny thing but after all these many changes of dates in your programme you will arrive in Baghdad on Saturday, and on the next day, Sunday, according to my calendar, it is Hazrat Ali's birthday. That is a happy coincidence. You will be there on that big day".

It was more than a coincidence, I realised. On my return from the Iranian Consulate with this information, I told my wife I was definitely leaving on Saturday. I proudly announced, "Hazrat Ali wants me there for his birthday on Sunday".

With one stop on the way, I landed at Baghdad airport about 10 o'clock in the morning. B.O.A.C. had signalled their Baghdad office about my arrival. Their manager, an Englishman, came to the airport to meet me.

"I'll only be a few minutes", the manager said, "and then I'll drive you into town".

"Take your time", I replied, "I am in no hurry". I leaned on a counter at the airport while he attended to his work. As I was hanging around I noticed a tall young Arab in a light grey suit pacing up and down, saying in a loud, guttural voice something like, "Khorakha, Khorakha". It sounded as if he was peddling dates or nuts or something.

He walked twice around me, stopping at various groups of Arabs to speak to them. By then the B.O.A.C. manager was back with me and the young Arab was on his third

round. "Khorakha, Khorakha", he still kept saying in rather a loud voice.

"He could not be looking for me by any chance?" I asked the English manager.

"From Bombay?", the Arab inquired of me.

"Yes", the B.O.A.C. manager replied on my behalf.

"Ay—ditter?" asked the Arab. Then I knew he was calling for me. 'Ay-ditter' was his way of pronouncing 'editor', a word I recognised quicker than did the high official of B.O.A.C. I informed the Arab he had found the person he was looking for.

"Khorakha?" he again asked to make quite sure he had got the right man.

"Well, something like that", I said for I was in a happy, slightly frivolous mood that morning. The tall Arab pulled out a small piece of paper from his inside pocket and standing to attention, recited the words typed thereon, "I well-comb you. You will be guest of our government". He spoke his piece so seriously that I almost thought I was being charged and arrested, a formula with which I was not unfamiliar in my own country.

"The government takes precedence over B.O.A.C.", the jovial B.O.A.C. manager said, handing me over to the care of the Iraq Government.

The Arab drove me into town in a large, white Chevrolet Imphala. An American limousine was no novelty in Baghdad. In Arab countries, rich in oil, these cars are as ordinary as in the country of their manufacture. On the drive into town we made polite conversation. I asked questions about Baghdad and he in turn asked where I lived in India, what the climate was like in Bombay, all very polite patter, nothing more.

It was as we entered the main road leading to the hotel at which I was booked that the Arab informed me that for the duration of my stay he would be my guide and interpreter. "If there are any museums you wish to visit, any people you wish to interview or meet, I shall be happy to arrange for you". I thanked him for his kindness but

I said, "I've only come to visit one place and that is Najaf".

"Najaf " he exclaimed. "It is close to here. About 180 kilometres. But what do you want to do in Najaf?"

"Bow my head at the tomb of Hazrat Ali", I replied.

"You are not a Muslim", he said.

"That is so. I am not".

"Then why do you want to go to Najaf?"

I said, "I have come out of an illness. I believe Hazrat Ali saved my life. I have come here to thank him".

"All right, we will go sometime", he casually remarked.

"I will arrange. But what other programme should I arrange?"

"That's all; Najaf is all I want to see".

The Arab looked perplexed. Soon we arrived at the hotel. I was shown to my room, my escort accompanying me. It was nearly noon. The Arab suggested a coffee. I agreed. Drinking coffee is a ritual with the Arabs, black Turkish coffee slightly sweetened and with a froth of its own at the top. We began to chat again. Then he said, "Excuse my asking you, sir, but when you are not a Muslim, why do you wish to visit Najaf so much?" He hurriedly added, "Forgive me asking this personal question".

"Not at all", I replied, "I will tell you. Fourteen years ago I had a dream. In that dream Hazrat Ali appeared. I did not know who he was. He uncovered his face for me; he took my hand in his. Since then I have followed him. Since the beginning of this year I have had a great urge to come to his tomb. So here I am".

"But you are a well-known journalist, my government said".

"This trip is a pilgrimage".

My tall Arab friend looked more puzzled than ever. Then quite spontaneously he said, "If the purpose of your trip is to visit Najaf, let's do it first. Let's go".

"When?" I asked.

"Straightaway. After lunch".

I gave his remark a moment's thought. I had been up early that morning to catch the flight but I was not over-

tired. Hazrat Ali's birthday was on Sunday according to the Iran Consulate's calendar but why not go today? I could go again tomorrow, I reasoned.

"Yes, now", the Arab repeated. "We have the car and we will be there in three and a half hours. The road is good".

"Okay, fine. Let's go. I'll have a bath and change".

"We will leave straight after lunch", the Arab concluded. He got up to leave, saying, "I will go to my house, tell my people, fill the car with petrol while you bath. I'll be back in half an hour and we will have lunch".

I felt pleased at the arrangements spontaneously made. The Arab left. A few minutes before one o'clock he was back and we went down to the dining room.

As we were lunching, my Arab friend said, "When I went home I told my wife and my mother that you had dreamt of Hazrat Ali. I said you want to go to Najaf, but that you were not Muslim. I asked if that would be all right. My mother, who is very religious replied, 'He does not need to be a Muslim to go to Hazrat Ali'."

When lunch was over, we drove to Najaf. It was oven-hot, a dry parching wind blew on our faces as we sped along the long straight asphalt road at a speed of over 120 kilometres an hour. Because of the heat, I dropped off to sleep during the early part of the drive but nearing Najaf I woke up to see typical Arab mud huts in the small villages, which we passed on the way.

The driver of our car was well versed in legend. When he learned that Najaf was my destination and Hazrat Ali my main interest, he began to narrate all the tales he knew of Najaf and nearby Kerbala. Kerbala was the parched plain where the holy war was fought and where Imam Husain, the second son of Hazrat Ali by his first wife Fatima, was killed as also most of his family and followers. He had come there to affirm his claim to the Caliphate after the death of his elder brother Hasan. Along with Husain, Hazrat Abbas was also killed while fetching water for the children of Husain. Abbas was Hazrat Ali's son by his second wife, Ummul Baneen. Thus Abbas was a step-

brother of Husain, and of Hasan. Abbas was the loyal standard bearer, called an *alamdar*, in the holy war at Kerbala. Husain and Abbas were buried at Kerbala; Hazrat Ali himself was buried at Najaf. The choice of Najaf as the burial place for Hazrat Ali was in accordance with a special directive from the prophet Mohammed.

Legend, folk-lore, religious history, rolled into one, came from our taxi driver's lips along that long straight road as simple as the fables we heard in our childhood days. He told us how the Prophet Mohammed died. The driver said, "Mohammed was not sick or ailing. He was sitting up erect in prayer when the spirit of God came down from the heavens. 'Mohammed', God said, 'come with me. Your work on earth is over'. Mohammed recognised the image of his Maker and humbly he yielded his earthly form to Him".

At a certain point along the Baghdad-Najaf road, the driver turned his head left and pointed with his finger to an open space in the distance. He then narrated how Hazrat Ali was killed. "Ali was saying his prayers when an assassin struck him with a poisoned sword. For two days and two nights Hazrat Ali lived; on the third day, he died".

I listened intently to the tale. The driver went on, "The people were so enraged that when they laid hands on the assassin they dismembered him. They tore his flesh into little pieces and strewed them around this place where they caught him. The earth turned black where the pieces fell and not a blade of grass nor a leaf has ever grown on this patch of ground since then. You can see the black earth, there in the distance", he kept pointing with a steady finger in that direction.

Books, written by scholars more versed in Islamic history than my driver, give a different version. They speak of Ali's generosity towards his assassin. Kufa too where Hazrat Ali was killed could not have been in the direction in which the driver pointed. Nor do these details matter in the context of my first trip to Najaf. The important thing was that I was going to the man who came to me in a dream.

So we came to Najaf. While still a few miles away I noticed the tip of a golden dome glistening in the afternoon sun. A few minutes later, driving through narrow, winding lanes, we came to a circular market place and when our car pulled up alongside one of the tall gateways that led to the shrine I was awe-struck by the scene, so different from anything I had expected to see.

Najaf is a very small town, typically Arab. The tomb of Hazrat Ali is its focal point. A narrow road, unpaved, runs around the tomb with shops on both sides selling a variety of merchandise: amber beads strung in prayer necklaces which the Arabs use, coarse rugs used for decoration or for prayer, *hookahs* through which the orthodox Muslims smoke their tobacco and a variety of ornamental brassware. Nearly every third shop was selling food of some sort from spiced *shish kababs* full of chillies, the *kababs* each a foot long, to sweet-meats covered with silver paper and flies. In their long robes, the Arabs were drinking either Turkish coffee or one of the brands of cola's. The shops looked as if they were temporary structures built at the time of a village fair. That was the outer scene, which we in the East regard as mundane and prosaic.

As the sun was setting we stepped out of the car onto the paved courtyard around Hazrat Ali's tomb. It was a magnificent sight. The dome of the mausoleum was newly covered with shining gold leaf, perhaps in readiness for his birthday. Two tall gold minarets at the sides stood sentinel over this holy site. Hundreds of Arabs knelt in prayer in the open courtyard. I had arrived at the time of evening *namaz*.¹ In the Arab world the new day begins at sunset.

While the predominant colour of this scene was the

¹ Prayer.

bright gold of the dome, the exterior of this mosque had an inlaid mosaic pattern of powder blue and white, interspersed with gold and an occasional splash of Middle East rust. It is a colour frequently seen on the mosques of Iran and Iraq. Arab women uniformly dressed in black walked past me, their faces fully or half covered with their *abbas*.¹

The mausoleum was breathtaking. It far outstripped the pallid splendour of the Taj Mahal at Agra, the marble tomb which the Mogul Emperor, Shah Jehan, built for his Empress, Mumtaz Mahal. The Taj would look insipid beside this splash of colour at Najaf.

Already from the outer courtyard I could feel a tremor of excitement in me. The excitement grew as my Arab escort said, "Follow me. But don't touch anything". Earlier he had told me that as I was not a Muslim I could only see the tomb from outside. Disappointing though this was, I would not transgress the rules of any religious place. Yet it did not seem possible to me that Hazrat Ali would let me come to him all this distance from India, only to stand as an outcast in the outer courtyard of his tomb. Nevertheless, I did as I was told. Then something happened to change my escort's mind. He decided to lead me to the entrance to the inner shrine. Here we took off our shoes. What had made him change his mind I did not know, but he was taking me into the mausoleum itself.

So I followed him into the inner sanctum. At the very moment I entered the great hall, all the lights went on. I looked up; the dome was filled with a thousand small mirrors in which a million lights were reflected. It was a gorgeous sight. I felt almost electrified by this welcome. My spirits which had been dampened by my escort's remarks about not touching anything, became bouyant. I felt I was there by special invitation from Hazrat Ali himself. I began to feel the same quiver of excitement that I had felt in the dream fourteen years ago when he came to me, dressed in his snuff coloured Arab tunic, with the little gold

¹ An *abba* is like a *boorkha* but the face is open.

motif on it, his silken gold cord around his waist, a turban on his head, the piece of cloth which hid his face and which he uncovered for me, the bright beam of light which shone ahead of him as he walked. The people in the dream had known who he was. I had not. In awe and respect, they had uttered his name with a sigh, "Hazrat Ali . . . Hazrat Ali". Now I was standing beside his tomb, fourteen years later.

I looked up. The dome directly above his tomb was pure gold and all around it a high trellis of delicately wrought silver. The pilgrims to this shrine would, with two fingers, clutch the silver screen and hang from it uttering words of prayer. This silver railing is known as "The window of Ali". It was sent from Bombay in 1940 by the head priest of the Dawoodi Bohras, a sect of Muslims. The railing is made out of four hundred thousand *tolas*¹ of silver and two thousand *tolas*² of gold. A *tola* is equal to 4 ounces. I did not go too near it because the Arab had told me not to touch anything. Once when I was accidentally pushed towards it and my hand would have fallen on it, my escort quickly pulled it away.

There were lots of people in the big hall. Occasionally a single coolie, carrying on his head a dead body in a light cane bier, would hurriedly encircle three times around Hazrat Ali's tomb, uttering his name. This is a pre-burial ritual.

In a corner of the room, I lit three incense sticks from the bundle I had brought with me from India. With these in my hand, I stood and prayed for my family, my work, my friends and lastly also for myself. Above all I thanked him for having come to me in a dream. All through my prayers I kept away from the railing as I was told to do. Yet inside me I did feel a little hurt that I, who regarded myself as so close to the saint enshrined in this holy place could not touch even the railing, when in my dream Hazrat Ali had, of his own accord, taken my hand in his.

¹ 10,000 lbs.

² 50 lbs.

Just then an elderly priest wearing a long grey robe and a red fez who had been following us, came closer to the Arab escort and to me. These priests are called *sayyads*. There were several like him in the big room at Najaf. This one looked particularly dignified, for he was very senior and had an air of authority about him. He wore a short white beard, an elderly man with a benevolent face. He started to speak to my escort in Arabic. The escort became somewhat confused, then turned to me, saying, "The *sayyad* wants to say a prayer for you". I nodded my head to indicate that I would be pleased if he did. As soon as the *sayyad* saw me nodding to his suggestion, he upturned the palms of his hands and in clear loud Arabic, began a prayer for me. It must have lasted about three minutes. It echoed in the surrounding silence. Although in Arabic, I could understand only a few of the words, I could follow the content of the prayer. He prayed for my health, for my family, for any work; he prayed that my troubles, if any, be abated. He prayed that my *dooshman*, my enemies, be vanquished. Though uttered at a Muslim shrine and in a language foreign to me, it was beautiful to listen to. Then the *sayyad* beckoned me to follow him. He took me right up to the silver railing. There he called a younger *sayyad* to join him. He gave the younger man some directions. The latter started another prayer for me. He stopped after saying a few words and looked at me. My Arab escort hurriedly said, "You must repeat after him". Not knowing Arabic, I repeated his words with both *sayyads* nodding approval of my effort. So it went on till the whole prayer was ended. "*Inshallah*", they both said at the end, almost together, an invocation to Allah that our prayer be granted. Then the elder priest took my hand and placed my two fingers on the carved silver railing, the very thing my escort had told me not to do. The *sayyad* said a sentence to me in Arabic with Hazrat Ali in it. Twice he looked at me and twice he told the Arab escort that he knew who I was. Perhaps as with the *mujawar* at Maula Ali in Hyderabad, this *sayyad* had got a direction from the tomb, for the low

*adab*¹ he did to me as we parted, appeared to have had some meaning.

By now my heart was full and my mind a total blank. All the things I had come to say to Hazrat Ali, got blotted out. My Arab escort was getting impatient because of the *sayyads* who were beginning to crowd around me. He decided it was time for us leave. I bowed my head in respect to *Baba* and with a last look at his tomb, we came out, through the courtyard, through the tall gate, back into the market place.

"Now we go home", the Arab said.

"No, we don't go home", I said in an undertone looking back in that grey blue hour of the evening at that beautiful mausoleum which was the tomb of Hazrat Ali, my Ali as I have called him that day and ever since. Presumptuous perhaps but symbolic of the attachment that had grown with the years.

Just then the Arab escort asked, "Have a Pepsi Cola?"

It was obvious we were not on the same wave length. "No", I said, "you go somewhere. Go and drink Pepsi Cola, have a *kabab*, do what you like but for twenty minutes, don't disturb me. I want to pray". With this I turned to the mausoleum and like the *sayyads* I opened the palms of my hands. "*Baba*", I began, "you have fooled me. I believed I was coming to the tomb of a *fakir*. But not even an emperor could have a tomb as magnificent as yours".

It was in those moments at Najaf, that evening at sundown that I learned to acquire humility, without which closeness to Hazrat Ali would not have been possible. This is a humility of the spirit; it does not imply bowing or scraping or waiting for crumbs to fall from the tables of those in power. The closeness I have since felt towards Hazrat Ali is that which a child instinctively feels for a parent to whom he is beholden. I started by calling him '*Bawa*', the Gujarati word, which I felt was artificial. After Najaf,

¹ Muslim way of greeting with the hand cupped, moving towards the face while the head is kept bowed.

in that Arab setting, when my dream came to life and the men in it were no longer foreign to me, I began to call him *Baba*, the Arab word for father. I feel closer now than ever before. I feel, without any justification whatsoever, that I belong to his family. Strangely a purely personal relationship with no change of religion involved. I remain as I was born, a Parsi.

Dusk fell at Najaf and I saw my Arab escort sitting patiently on a chair on the road outside a restaurant. I indicated to him and to our driver that I was about ready to leave.

People kept coming and going out of the mausoleum. A *sayyad* came out. He was blind in his right eye. I said to my Arab escort, "Ask him when exactly is the birthday of Hazrat Ali".

Came the answer, "Now ... today ... right now. It has already begun".

I returned to Baghdad that night, still full of the glow of Najaf. I was trying to absorb every detail I could remember and to attach a meaning to it. I realised that a second visit on the following day should not be undertaken. He had wanted me there as his birthday commenced and I had arrived exactly at sundown, after strange turns and twists of circumstance. To go there again the next day even though it would still be his birthday would have spoilt the glorious welcome he had given me. I went to bed without dinner that night and the next morning I checked whether I could get an earlier plane to Tehran than the one on which I was booked. I found I could. I left Baghdad on Sunday afternoon.

The five days in Iran moved swiftly with a day spent at Isfahan at the ornate Hotel Shah Abbas, the showpiece for tourists. I spent some time looking at quaint, curio shops on the main road where I found little gold medallions, the size of an old English sixpence, with the head of Hazrat Ali embossed on them. The Ali, as portrayed in Iran is entirely different from my concept of him, based on my dream. The Iranian image is Christ-like, thin, elongated.

The picture in my mind, however, clearly remains that of a strong and powerful man, a *pahelvan* as I have earlier described him.

From Iran, having had my fill of caviar I flew to Italy. The first week was spent in Milan studying the growth of Italian industry. Then I came down to Rome, a city of great tradition, relic of a civilisation as great as that of the Persians and the Greeks. Within the precincts of Rome is Vatican City which is an independent state. Over it presides the Pontificus Maximus known to the world as His Holiness the Pope. The long line of Popes began with St. Peter in A.D. 67 and the Holy Father whom I was anxious to meet was Paulus VI. Out of courtesy, I had addressed my original request to the Cardinal in Bombay. I received a disappointing, off-hand verbal reply through his secretarial staff regretting his inability to do anything in this matter.

When I arrived in Rome, I happened to mention in my prayer to Baba, "It's strange that I can come to you in Najaf, yet all manner of little men stand in the way of my meeting a living man like the Pope". The same evening, again by strange coincidence, I met a man from the Vatican. He was Monseigneur Laghi, a high ranking official of the Vatican Secretariat. The Monseigneur, a man in his forties, was interested in knowing about my trip to Najaf, also why I was now in Rome and what I wanted to do in this great city. "I am in a religious mood, Monseigneur", I replied. "That's why I particularly wish to meet the Holy Father".

"I will inform the Vatican that you are here", was all he said.

This was on a Sunday night at a dinner party in a fashionable suburb of Rome. On Tuesday afternoon, the day before the weekly gathering at St. Peter's, the hall porter of my hotel rang me to say an envelope had arrived

for me from the Vatican. He was sending it up straight away. When I opened it I found it contained a blue card which entitled me to a specially reserved seat for the General Audience to be held at 11 a.m. That was something. I would at least see the Pope if I could not meet him. Later the same afternoon the telephone in my room rang again. The operator announced it was a call from the Vatican. I perked up. "Signor", said an official, "the Holy Father will receive you in Special Audience. Your invitation has been despatched to you care of the Indian Embassy". That, it seems, was the protocol.

Very beautifully printed in black script on an ivory card, it arrived soon thereafter. It informed me, in Latin, that *Sua Sanctità* which means His Holiness, would receive me in Special Audience at the hour of 12.30 in the '*Salla di Paramenti*', the entrance to which was from the *Portal di Bronze*. I felt quite elated.

I was at St. Peter's the next morning well before 11 o'clock. I walked up the steps of the Basilica and entered through the main door. An usher in a crimson satin suit showed me to a front seat in the rostrum on the right of the papal throne. The Pope's chair was a few yards from me under a gigantic, high canopy of bronze and gold. It is known as the Baldachin and is the work of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Bernini took nine years, from 1624 to 1633, to complete it. Twisted bronze columns, adorned with spirals and motifs of laurel branches and cherubs, hold up this canopy. Under it the Holy Father sits during General Audience. The original tomb of St. Peter lies below the papal throne, and directly above is the dome of the Basilica. The hall was packed: His Holiness addressed the congregation in a number of languages so that everyone present would be able to understand.

It was an extremely moving scene. The General Audience lasted over an hour and twenty minutes. At the end of it, the congregation received the Pope's blessings. With his hand he made, in the air, the sign of the

cross to his left, straight ahead of him, then to 'us on his right.

As the General Audience was ending and I had to be in another part of St. Peter's within the next ten minutes, I hurriedly made my way out through a side door to the *Portal di Bronze*, where I presented my white card to a Swiss guard. I was shown up three flights of steps, where there was a courtyard at a higher level. I went into another building, entered a lift and arrived on the first floor where a Vatican policeman in black and gold uniform, wearing a Napoleonic hat, showed me to the *Salla di Paramenti*, the room where the Holy Father was to receive me.

What a beautiful room this was! Its floor of beige, brown and black onyx was exquisitely polished. It was not a large room, square in shape. The Pope's chair, gold painted was placed on a slightly raised wooden dais at one end. Upright leather chairs, upholstered in black, were lined up on the three other sides of the room. This is the room where the Holy Father puts on his vestments before entering the Basilica for great ceremonial occasions. "*Paramenti*" is the Latin word for vestments.

Monseigneurs were in attendance on those of us who were to be received in Special Audience. Our names were checked as also the way they were pronounced. With a few moments to go before the Holy Father arrived, we were asked to line up facing the papal chair. Two cameramen who were in attendance, took up their positions. They were both from Felicci, the only photographer privileged to take picture in the Vatican. A Monseigneur on duty asked me whether I would like a picture in colour or in black and white. I requested one of each.

I had taken with me that day a copy of my book on Gandhi¹ the seventh edition, a special reprint for Mahatma Gandhi's centenary year. I felt it would be an appropriate offering to the Chief Pontiff who had so graciously granted me a Special Audience.

I stood sixth in line and behind me were some half a

¹ This book was originally called *Out of Dust*.

dozen people all to be presented singly to the Holy Father. There was a hush in the room as it was announced that he was arriving. From behind a curtain on our right, he emerged and hurriedly proceeded towards his chair. A handful of Monseigneurs in black and crimson were in attendance.

One by one our names were called out and each person moved up to the Holy Father. When my turn came, I moved forward, my book still tucked under my arm. He put out both his hands which I took with both of mine. The Catholics before me had knelt and kissed the Papal ring. He turned to the Monseigneur in attendance, a Canadian, to ask who I was. He was briefed about me. "India!", the Holy Father exclaimed. "We have been there and we are very fond of your country". I then presented my Gandhi book to him. He took it and when he read the name of Gandhi on the dust jacket, he said, "That is a very great name for us". When the Canadian Monseigneur explained it was written by me and that it was an edition especially printed for the centenary year, he politely added, "We shall treasure this book".

As I had brought him a gift, he graciously wished to give me something in return. Turning to another attendant the Pope said in an audible whisper, "Medallion". The attendant produced a bronze medallion in a grey case which the Holy Father gave to me, saying, "This is our medallion for you. It is the medallion of the Pontificate. You must now work for humanity". My head was bowed while receiving the medal. To these words I replied, "Holy Father, I do". The Monseigneur translated my reply to him.

"You do?", he said enthusiastically and I confirmed by nodding my head. At this he warmly clasped my right hand in both his and shook it enthusiastically. Then he said, "May God bless you always ... always".

Fellici's cameras were clicking fast. The two photographers must have taken half a dozen pictures of me as judged from the flashbulbs that were used. The picture in colour I was going to keep as a souvenir, ornately framed:

the black and white showing the Holy Father clasping my hand with both of his, I had mentally placed on the front page of *Current*. The thrilling moment ended as I bowed to the Holy Father and took his leave.

That was Wednesday, lunchtime. For the next two days I worked on my article. It was ready by Friday; only Felicci's pictures had yet to arrive. The hall porter and the enquiry desk of the hotel were aware I was waiting for them.

By the evening of Friday I became impatient and got through to Felicci's studio on the telephone. I asked if anyone spoke English. "*Momento*", a voice replied. Then another man came to the telephone. He asked what I wanted. I told him.

"Ah! With *Sancta Papa*", he said, recognising the lot I was referring to.

"That's right", I confirmed.

"Very sorry", he replied. "Negatives all come blank. There was no picture of you".

"Blank?"

"Very sorry", he repeated, adding in a puzzled way, "never happen before". With this, he hung up. I was left speechless at the other end of the phone.

I realised I could meet the Pontificus Maximus, Paulus VI; but there should be no pictures of me with him.

I felt I was being groomed for a new kind of discipline.

Into jail

EACH YEAR thereafter I felt the great Ali's presence closer to me. I paid a rushed second visit to Najaf in February 1970. While he allowed me to do this, he did not seem happy that I was at his mausoleum while its dome was being repainted. I do not accept the interpretation of others on what Hazrat Ali wishes me to do; I prefer to rely on my own judgment. Gradually the attachment has grown and in most difficult, sometimes desperate moments, I call out to him. Whilst there has never been for me any *awaaz* or sound from him, there often is a silent indication, if only in the way the smoke from the incense stick twirls, that he has heard me and that he is there.

On the night before my fifty-ninth birthday I had gone to bed feeling very dejected. Nothing was going right for me and the strain of the struggle was telling on my health. I stopped at the prayer table, lit a joss stick and said, "*Baba*, I am tired of asking. Give me what you want and when you want. Now, I'm going to bed".

Early on the morning of my birthday,¹ he came to me briefly in a dream. This time he was dressed as a *fakir* in a dark blue-grey Arab tunic. In this dream I was stepping into an old Ford, a 1920 model, with its hood folded back. Sitting in it was a young woman in a salmon pink

¹ April 14, 1970

long-sleeved chiffon dress, her hair worn in a bun on the top of her head. "Don't look now", I said to the girl in my dream, "But this man coming towards us is not a fakir. He is Hazrat Ali". As I finished speaking those words, he came right up to the side of the car door, his eyes looking down as if he were shy at being recognised. In the morning when I said to my wife, "I've already got my birthday present", she knew what it must be, for she said, "Another dream?"

I said, "Yes, but a small one. He didn't come himself for the glow of light which precedes him was not there. But he sent someone like him to tell me he is still around."

In August 1971 I flew to Singapore to meet Lee Kuan Yew, an example in socialism encouraging to watch. As I returned to Bombay's Santa Cruz airport four days later, it was to hear the happy tidings that our racing syndicate was the sole winner in Poona of a twice-carried-over jackpot of a million and a half rupees out of which my comparatively tiny share was Rs. 33,000, tax-free. But the strain of work was still telling on me. I felt I would crack up shortly.

On the evening of Friday, September 10, 1971, I decided to fly for a lazy weekend to nearby Poona. My filly was racing that Sunday. I did not get to the race-course; instead, on Sunday morning, panting for breath, I was rushed to the local nursing home. With oxygen being fed through my nostrils, needles in my arm, I was laid on my back in its Intensive Care Unit with an 'artero-lateral infarct' while the doctors battled for my life. These were the three medical words, among others which figured in my case papers.

I had very few lucid moments during the first ninety-six hours of that illness for I was under heavy sedation. I remember through the vague haze seeing doctors and nurses bent over my extended left arm while blood was being drained out of it. I also remember saying, "I'm not praying any more. If anyone wants to, they can pray for me". Quite a few people, it seems did, for it was not an illness from which a man could normally walk out alive.

On Friday, October 15, propped up by cushions, accom-

panied by a nurse, I was driven down to Bombay in an air-conditioned car. I recovered very slowly and although I resumed work after many weeks, I was far from being really well. Through November of 1971 the newspapers were full of the prognosis of war between Pakistan and India.

Eighteen years before that, soon after President Ayub Khan had come to power, I had made the first move towards better relations between our two countries. With the permission of the Indian government, I approached Ayub Khan for an exclusive interview which he agreed to give me. The High Commissioner for Pakistan in India, not knowing which visa he should stamp on my passport, delayed it in transit, with the result that I had to leave India without a passport, and enter Pakistan without either a passport or a visa, an all-time record for an Indian travelling between the two countries. I stayed on that brief trip with the then Commerce Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who later became its President.

On the evening of my arrival Bhutto and his most attractive wife threw a dinner party to which half the Cabinet was invited — to meet me.

Of my effort, Ayub Khan¹ wrote in a letter to me in November 1963:

"I recall your last visit to Pakistan with pleasure. Any effort aimed at bringing human beings together and creating an area of mutual understanding and goodwill is worthwhile regardless of the results. The attempt which you made to provide an atmosphere for amity and good-neighbourly relations was, no doubt, inspired by great sincerity and the highest of motives.

"... I look forward to the day when our relations with India will become as friendly and normal as with our other neighbours".

They are still looking !

¹ Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan

Monday, December 13, 1971: I was in bed, fast asleep, I was sleeping heavily because I had been prescribed a strong sedative. At one o'clock in the morning I was woken up to be told some policemen had come from the Commissioner of Police. As I had spoken to this official earlier that same day regarding a demonstration which some communists had planned against my paper and me, a message from him did not surprise me. But it did seem peculiar that he should have sent it at that late hour of the night. I went to the front door to see.

Through the eye-hole I saw four men. They were in plain clothes, but their faces were unmistakably stamped with the look of those who did ugly jobs. As my dogs were close to me, I let the four men in. In the group was an inspector of police who was elderly, an officious sub-inspector and two others who looked so unintelligent I could not understand why they had been brought along. The sub-inspector presented a piece of paper to me, saying, "Please take this Order and sign on the copy as having received it". I took the Order and read it. It said:

ORDER

SBI/G/1/MISA/1971 Bombay, December 1971.
Whereas the Commissioner of Police of Greater Bombay is satisfied with respect to the person known as Dosabhoy Framji Karaka, of 12 Carmichael Road, Bombay 26, that with a view to preventing him from acting in any manner prejudicial to the defence of India, it is necessary to make the following order: Now therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-clause (1) of clause (a) of sub-section (1) of section 3 of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act 1971, read with clause (c) of sub-section (2) of section 3 of the said Act and with clause (c) of sub-section (6) of section 6 of the Defence of India Act 1971, the

Commissioner of Police, Greater Bombay directs that the said Dosabhoy Framji Karaka be detained.

S. G. PRADHAN

Commissioner of Police, Greater Bombay.

No reason was given why this police official was 'satisfied' that I should be 'detained'. Under the Security Act referred to, no reason was required to be given at the time of depriving a free man of his liberty. Only by the fifth day some grounds for detention, however absurd, were required to be furnished to the detenu.

The sub-inspector spoke loosely of 'arrest' and I had twice to correct him. A detention is not an arrest, I told him, but to these less sensitive men accustomed to handling a low breed of criminals it seemed to make little difference.

"Where are you taking me?" I inquired of the policemen.

"Arthur Road", they replied almost in unison.

That was strange, very strange. On that day in October when I was being driven down from Poona, the driver, on reaching Bombay, had taken a different turning off the main road from that which I normally take. As a result we drove along Arthur Road, on which stands the famous jail. In a pensive mood that morning after weeks in hospital, I thought to myself, "I made more dents in British imperialism than many others but I have never had the dubious honour of landing in this jail. Now, in a free India, at sixty, it's too late". Uncanny coincidence, or was somebody warning me?

The police gave me a few minutes to shower and dress. I packed a few garments into a small black weekend suitcase and all the medicines prescribed for my heart and my diabetes. Not having any idea of the requirements of jail, I did not know what I should take.

At 1.30 a.m. I was driven to prison. Because of the blackout it was pitch dark. We pulled up outside the prison gate. Those family members who had come with me were allowed no further. The main gate was closed at night but a door inset into it opened, through which,

by bending my head low, I was able to step in. On my lips as I entered were the two words I had learned to utter at moments such as these, '*Ya Ali*'. In moments of stress and anguish, this was my greatest prayer. It was in reality a call to Ali to intercede on my behalf.

The police party and I entered the office of the jailor and awaited his arrival. He had to be woken up to take charge of me. Around me on the floor of the jail office were policemen, stretched out, fast asleep. A little mouse was running around them.

When the jailor arrived he was handed another Order. He began to read it loudly to himself.

ORDER

The person known as Dosabhoy Framji Karaka detained under my Order No. SNI/1/MISA/1971 dated 13th December 1971 (a) shall be detained in the Bombay District Prison Class I at Bombay and (b) shall, for the purpose of Maintenance of Internal Security (Maharashtra Conditions of Detention) Order 1971, be treated as Class I security prisoner.

S. G. PRADHAN

Commissioner of Police, Greater Bombay.

He then gave some instructions down the line, pausing particularly to emphasise the words "Class I"; amenities which did not exist any more in this jail.

I was then asked what money I carried on me.

"Sixty Rupees",¹ I replied, for I had counted it before leaving my house.

"You will have to hand them over", he said, "also your wrist watch".

"My watch as well?"

"Yes", he replied sternly, "jail regulations".

I handed them over. They were put into a brown paper envelope and sealed. Their loss did not impoverish me for I had already lost the most cherished possession of civilised man, my freedom.

¹ Slightly over £ 3.

I began to realise more sharply than before that real freedom had yet to my country. In place of the British whom we once complained had oppressed us, we now had indigenous opportunists and communists, and layers of administrative corruption.

The formalities of jail having been completed, the jailor led the way through the dark grounds, lit only by the faint glow of a paper-covered torch. I could hardly see the path ahead. Occasionally a jail guard walking beside me would give me an arm on which to lean. At a certain point we turned right and came to a little two-room stone-built structure, on the left of which was a closed room referred to as the library; on the right was my cell. The light in the narrow passage was switched on. A bright 100-watt bulb burned despite the blackout regulations.

My cell was about 8' by 5' with a narrow extension 6' long and about 2' wide. In this was set an Indian-style latrine. It seemed to have been unused for many months for it was filled with rubble. The cell was on the ground floor. It had a door and a barred aperture opposite. A chilly breeze blew through the cell. A kindly jail guard walking in the grounds noticing I was cold, tried to close the gap with a gunny bag.

The bed in the cell was a hard and rusty iron cot, almost square in shape. On it, for my use, were thrown two coarse *khaddar* sheets and an *odhni*, which was a thin quilt of mixed cotton and wool. These were clean and laundered. I made a bed as best I could. I was still full of sleep because of the sedative I had taken. Soon the heavy iron door of my prison cell, similar to that which banks have at the entrance to their safe deposit vaults, closed behind me. I heard its key being turned in the lock. It was a moment of great disillusionment.

I stood at the entrance of the extension that led to the lavatory. That was the only place in my cell where I could stand without being observed by the jail guards prowling in the corridor outside. "Baba", I said, "is this a test you wish me to go through? Are these dirty people

to be allowed to push me around, in my state of health and at my age," I added, "Give me the strength to go through it".

Soon the worst of the shock began to subside. I could feel the strength from within, of my being educated, self-disciplined and most of all being well-bred. "They won't break me; they won't even bend me," I kept saying to myself. With a long, deep sigh I again uttered "*Ya Ali*" and lay down under the blankets. Outside my cell, someone had placed a kerosene lantern for the electric light was now switched off. All was quiet and still.

I closed my eyes. Without a watch it was difficult to tell the time. Soon, however, the voices of the jail guards talking to each other could be heard. They disturbed me. They were asking each other in Marathi, the regional language, who I was and when I had come.

"He came a little while ago", the other guard replied. "Class One day-tin-yew!" 'Detenu' was the word he was trying to pronounce.

"Class One", the other repeated. Then their voices faded into the silence that fell over Arthur Road jail. I must have fallen asleep, though restlessly, for some twenty minutes later I once again heard the shuffling of feet in the little passage outside my cell, followed by an authoritative voice which asked, "When did he come?". Scraps of conversation followed this question. Soon, through the iron bars a torch was turned on to my face. Heavy with sleep, I sat up in my iron bed and noticed a stockily built *jamadar*¹ looking at me through the bars. In a throaty voice he inquired, "When did you come?" I did not answer his question but dropped my head back on the tiny pillow I was given as part of my 'Class One' comforts. He commented, "Sleepy he is, never mind let him sleep". Then, meaning to be kind to me, he half shouted the words meant for me to hear, "If you need anything, let me know. I am here".

Some time later, when for the third time I had fallen asleep with sheer fatigue, I again heard voices outside my

¹ High ranking peon.

prison cell. This time the 100-watt electric light was switched on. Through the bars, I could see a middle-aged official, a dark-skinned Christian, pipe in hand, standing under the high-powered electric light. "Saldanha", I said, realising it must be the superintendent of Arthur Road jail.

"You already know my name", he said.

I replied it was my business to know it. He had been pulled out of bed because a special message had arrived about me from the State Government. "You have to be removed from here", Saldanha said.

"Where do I go now?" I inquired.

"We have to transfer you to the prison hospital at once, the order says".

"Why? I'm not very ill now", I told him.

"The government has ordered your removal to hospital", he replied.

"Why?" I again asked.

"You are a heart patient. We cannot take the responsibility for you here".

I packed my bag and moved out of the cell. I walked through the dark garden, back to the jailor's office where a few more people had gathered. The superintendent was already back at his desk, waiting for me.

We sat in the office of the superintendent of the Arthur Road jail waiting for police transport to take me to the prison hospital. The prison doctor who had been awakened, sat next to me. The time must have been just after four in the morning, a perfect time to wake up and move a heart patient from one location to another! I was lurching with fatigue. I also felt extremely thirsty. My throat was parched. I turned to Saldanha and asked if it was permissible under the regulations to ask for something to drink. "Tea or coffee, whatever is possible", I said.

Everyone shuffled to attention at my request, and one of the sepoy produced a tin of instant coffee from a drawer of the desk while another sepoy rushed to a nearby teashop which had opened by this time of the morning, to fetch some hot milk. A few minutes later the milk arrived. The hot coffee took some of the chill out of my body. I was grateful for this courtesy shown to me.

The police car, a black Ambassador, mechanically an Indian variation of the old Morris, finally arrived. In it was the same police inspector who had come to my house. He produced for the superintendent a handwritten note which asked for the delivery of me, back from jail custody to that of the police. Saying goodbye to the jail guards assembled around me, I stepped onto the pitch dark of Arthur Road. I was driven into town where the prison hospital was situated.

The doctor on duty at the main hospital had to be woken up to admit me. In a wheel-chair I was taken to 'Ward 14', a cryptic name for a ghastly hole. Separating it from the rest of the hospital were two sets of iron padlocked gates to ensure the sick inmates could not escape. On a wooden nameboard, newly painted, were the large white letters, PRISON HOSPITAL.

Through iron bars my admission papers were handed in, but the sepoy on night duty at the jail hospital informed the police inspector that they were not able to read what was written on it.

"But isn't there any clerk¹ who can read?", the inspector asked in considerable annoyance.

One of the sepoy merrily replied, "Nobody can read here. We are all illiterate. You'll have to wait for the jailor who comes in the morning. He alone can read".

"What time in the morning does he arrive?" the inspector asked, getting more irritable now.

"10 o'clock", came the nonchalant reply.

It was 5.30 a.m. now. The inspector was getting more

¹ The word used was "karkun".

and more agitated over the state of affairs in the prison hospital, when a Muslim nurse, perhaps the most helpful individual on the premises, intervened. She did not speak English, but she was aware no patient could be left out for four and a half hours. She informed the inspector she would take me in on her responsibility. The first iron gate of the prison hospital was opened and I was wheeled into a space between the two gates. The gate was re-locked behind me! Then the next gate was opened. I was wheeled left along a dark verandah into a room with two beds in it. In a corner of this room a kerosene lamp was burning.

"You will have to sleep here till the morning", the nurse said pointing to one of the beds.

"Here?" I asked, horrified by the look of the place. "Is there no other place I can sleep?", I asked the nurse.

I stepped back out of this room and noticed a room next door which was closed. I asked the sepoy what this room was.

"*Nahi, saheb*", which meant "No, sir", a thin sepoy replied with a giggle, chewing beetlenut with the red juice oozing out at the side of his lips, "that room has not been opened and cleaned for two years". Perhaps he thought he would make me feel better by adding the information, "No one of any importance comes here. We get only *mamuli*,¹ low class convicts here. I don't know who could have sent you here. Tomorrow, when the jailor comes, he will tell you".

A hospital room left uncleaned for two years! Anywhere else in the world such an establishment would have been struck off the medical list, even though it may have been only a prison hospital.

I looked at the bed given to me. "*Baba*", I said, "why are you punishing me so very hard?" In the dim light of the kerosene lamp I could see how filthy was the bed-sheet. It had blood marks left on it from the patient who had slept there before me. It was light brown with dirt and felt sticky with sweat but my body

¹ Ordinary.

was so tired that I stretched out on this dirty bed to catch a little sleep. But even then sleep was not possible. There was a constant clatter of utensils and noise of guards walking up and down the corridor outside my room. One of them decided to walk into the room and switch on the electric light to have a closer look at me. Then he switched off the light and went away. Another guard came in a few minutes later and asked in Marathi, "How do you feel?" I turned my face away lest I should be too aggressive to this illiterate man who meant no offence, but who was unaware of the irritation he was causing me. I lay on that dirty bed till 7.30 in the morning when the same Muslim nurse came in with a thermometer and a blood pressure unit. I had no fever but my blood pressure was distinctly high. I asked her if it were possible to get a cup of tea. After much discussion with an attendant, she informed me that tea was over for the 'inmates' but that she had ordered a cup for me from the doctors' canteen. This was intended to be an act of special kindness!

The cup of tea arrived forty-five minutes later, luke warm and full of sugar, pure poison for me, but I drank it all the same. The hospital attendant who had brought it then asked "Who is going to pay for this cup of tea?"

I told him, "You will have to ask the government for payment. All my money has been taken away from me".

My answer was not at all satisfactory to him. He protested that he had brought the tea especially for me from the canteen. He suggested I must have some money hidden somewhere from which I should pay! As I had already drunk the tea there was nothing I could do. Protesting, he walked away.

Soon thereafter I moved out of my room to ascertain from the guards where the bathroom was. One of the jail sepoy indicated it with a finger. I moved in that direction to perform my ablutions. The bathroom was an amazing sight. The grey stone floor was soaking wet with urine. But this I realised was a minor irritation in com-

parison with the things of life which mattered: human dignity and human freedom. One I still had; the other I had lost. I stood on the verandah outside my room and looked through the iron grill which hemmed me in. Then to drown my thoughts and to prove that the body, if not the mind, was still functioning I paced up and down, quietly repeating to myself, "*Ya Ali, Ya Ali, Ya Ali...*"

Through the bars, I saw the jail sepoy turning over the pages of a morning paper and I asked him whether I could have a look at it. He shook his head and said, "Not 'till the jailor arrives". It was authority speaking. Later he tried to become a little more friendly and asked, "What is the matter with you?" He gave me the assurance, "You will be better here". I did not reply.

After pacing the verandah a few times, I went back to my two-cot room, to look upon the sordid sight which was my bed. I lifted the bedsheet to see what the mattress was like and I was appalled by what I saw. It looked as if a woman in labour had bled to death over it. *Detenu Class One!*

At the other end of my room, which was not very deep, there was a small wooden door which had iron bars. Two faces were peering at me. They were wearing clothes provided by the prison hospital, a coarse white pyjama and a loose *kurta* or shirt. The shorter of the two men chirped a 'good morning' in English to me, which I reciprocated. I moved across to talk to them. He then volunteered the information that he was behind bars due to bad luck only because of a civil offence. Soon he switched over to Gujarati his regional language, and went on to inform me of the facts of his case. It seems that he had stood surety for Rs. 1,200 for a doctor in his native village. The doctor, it appears, disappeared to England. As this little fellow was unable to pay the amount of his bail bond when it was presented, he had to serve a jail sentence instead. Then, pointing to the younger man next to him, who was much taller, he said with great gusto, "but my friend will be here much longer than I". As the younger

man could not speak English, I asked him in Hindi why he was there. This he misunderstood to be an inquiry about the ailment which had brought him to this hospital. He lifted his *kurta*¹ and pointed to his stomach. "It must be jail food", I remarked after I got a close-up view of his solar plexus. My observation, intended to be frivolous, was ignored, and the short fellow continued with his introduction, of his prison colleague. "He has been given a twenty year jail sentence", the little chap said. "He has already done two years rigorous — eighteen more to go".

"Twenty years rigorous imprisonment! Whatever did you do?" I asked this innocuous looking young man on the other side of the barred door. He had stretched his left hand high up, scratched his armpit with the other, yawned, then gave me his quite one word reply, "Murder".

"Murder?"

Regaining my composure I asked, "Whom did you kill?"

"A policeman", he calmly replied.

There was a noticeable pause as we looked at each other through the iron bars which separated us.

The little fellow broke our gaze by saying, "And what have you done, sir?"

I noticed he spoke to me with much respect.

"Nothing upto now", I replied. "But you certainly give me ideas!"

Thus began my six-day detention. That day my wife was in Paris after a TWA inaugural flight. She was due to fly back to Bombay on Wednesday morning. I had arranged that she should only hear about my detention after her return home. The ordinary people of every service — police, customs, the airline — were superb. When she came into the jail hospital with police permission soon after her return, I said, "Don't worry. I seem to have a new kind of strength I haven't known before. I feel my nerves are made of iron and my guts are made of steel". There was no need for me to tell her from where that strength had come.

On Friday afternoon I received a further communication

¹ Shirt

from the Commissioner of Police informing me of the grounds of my detention.

His epistle, delivered to me in the jail hospital, read:

NOTICE

Office of the Commissioner of Police,
Greater Bombay.

No. SC. I/G/1/MISA/1971

In pursuance of section 8 of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, 1971 (26 of 1971), you Shri Dosabhoy Framji Karaka of 12, Carmichael Road, Bombay 26 are hereby informed that the grounds on which a detention order has been made by me on the 13th day of December 1971 against you under clause (a) (1) of sub-section (1) read with clause (c) of sub-section (2) of section 3 of the said Act and section 6(6) of the Defence of India Act, 1971 (42 of 1971), are as follows viz :—

That since the beginning of Pakistan's military action against the people of the erstwhile East Pakistan on the 25th March 1971 you have been editing and writing articles prejudicial to the Defence of India in the weekly newspaper "*Current*".

(a) Thus, the issue of the "*Current*" dated the 27th November 1971 contained an article captioned "INDIAN JUTE MILLOWNERS DOING ROARING TRADE", in which *inter alia* the following statements occur:—

"You feel the tension on our eastern borders as you land at Dum Dum airport. For one sees ack-ack guns, surface-to-air missiles and troops with machine guns in bunkers protected by thick walls of sand bags, all through the runway on touch-down.

"Dum Dum no more appears to be a civil airport these days The presence of military personnel in the terminal building either waiting for flights to Gauhati and Agartala or on security duty, makes one conscious of the impending emergency".

The said article thereby divulged vital information of use to an enemy and was prejudicial to the Defence of India.

(b) In the issue of the "*Current*" dated the 11th December 1971, after the outbreak of hostilities with Pakistan you wrote an article captioned "RECEIVERS OF AID ARE NOW AT WAR", in which you made the following among other observations:—

"Not enough to eat, but strong enough to attempt to destroy each other, lamentably for the third time now.

"This no civilised, educated person can applaud... This is not a war that can be won. It is a disease of the mind resulting from poverty of leadership which has to be endured. No people as poor as that of India and Pakistan can afford a war.... The suffering involved, now or later, we will silently have to endure".

These observations were bound to affect the morale of Indian people and particularly the members of its Defence Forces and undermine their will to defend themselves against the enemy and were thereby prejudicial to the Defence of India.

You were likely to continue to edit and write such articles prejudicial to the Defence of India.

It is not in the public interests to disclose further facts.

2. If you wish to make a representation against the detention order, you should address your representation to the Government of Maharashtra and forward it to Government through the Superintendent of the Hospital Prison, Bombay 1.

S. G. PRADHAN
Commissioner of Police
Greater Bombay

Dated: 17th December 1971.

To:

Shri Dosabhoy Framji Karaka, of
12, Carmichael Road, Bombay 26.

The first instance cited under (a) had been published in *Current* before the Internal Security Act and the Defence of India Act had been passed. So that the sand bags at Dum Dum airport could not become an offence with retrospective effect.

The second e under (b) speaks for itself.

On Saturday, after lunch, my lawyer called. We discussed my case fully in the time permitted, with a police official listening to our discussions. My lawyer worked over the weekend to draft a petition of *habeas corpus* to be submitted to the High Court as it opened on Monday morning.

At 2.45 p.m. on Sunday, I heard familiar voices coming down the hospital corridor. They were members of my family who had come to give me the news that an order for my release was on the way. Ten minutes later, two police officials arrived and stood stiffly to attention. They announced the government released they had no one to type the release order, it being Sunday but "You can go".

"You can go?" I said more firmly, "What do you mean 'You can go'? Go where?"

"I mean, sir, you are released".

I knew that a number of very fine people had worked for my release. The clinching move, however, came from abroad. The saddest thing to watch was the number of people of high official status but of inferior calibre who later were overanxious to deny having had any hand in causing my detention, when I was well aware of what they had said and done.

I packed my few belongings and left the prison for home. I had my first shower in a week. I changed into a lounge suit, stood at my prayer table, said my thanks to *Baba*. Then, tired and physically shaken though I was, I drove to Mahalaxmi, the Bombay race-course, on the Committee of which I had served for several years, so that thousands of people would be able to see that I had been set free.

There was consternation as I stepped out of my car. I went into the weighing room, collected my binoculars and walked calmly through the paddock to my private box on the first floor of the Members' Enclosure. While everyone welcomed me back at every step of the way, the warmth of greeting that came from the little men, the sepoys of the Royal Western India Turf Club, the watchmen on duty,

the various clerks and the workmen, was quite touching. No one used the indelicate, ugly word 'jail'. Many greeted me with folded hands, their heads bowed. When I stopped to shake hands with them, they took my hand in both of theirs as if a senior member of their own family had returned to them.

Three weeks later I was rushed to hospital with cardiac failure brought on by a pneumonic virus I had picked up during my six-day detention in the prison hospital. Whilst at home at the end of my convalescence, I had an important house guest for a very brief stay. He was *Current's* former London correspondent and Britain's former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Roy Jenkins. That evening we had a quiet dinner at the Taj Mahal Hotel, then returned home and before turning in, we talked for a while. A few hours later I awoke in a cold sweat with a racing pulse and steadily increasing blood pressure. Pulmonary oedema had set in and due to shortage of oxygen I felt close to collapse. I asked my wife who was at my bedside, "Has *Baba* said anything to you?"

"Yes", she replied. "Still alright, he said!"

I gave up worrying. The doctors took over the battle for my life once again. Some hours later I became conscious enough to hear my heart specialist say, "The worst is over".

End